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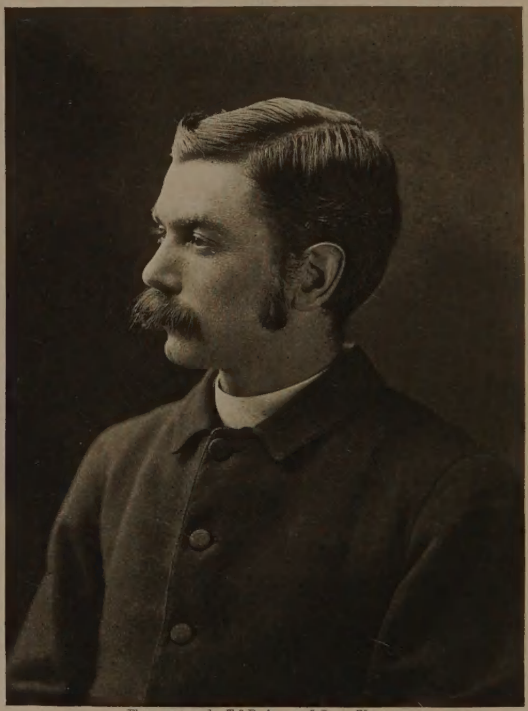
MEMORIALS

OF

ROBERT T. CUNNINGHAM, M.A.

MORRISON AND GIBB, PRINTERS, EDINBURGH.



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R. J. Cunningham

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MEMORIALS

OF

ROBERT T. CUNNINGHAM, M.A.

EDITED BY

REV. DAVID MILLER, M.A., STRANRAER.

WITH A PREFACE BY

REV. PROFESSOR BRUCE, D.D., GLASGOW.

EDINBURGH:
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1890.

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SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
AT CLAREMONT
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EDITOR'S NOTE.

THE Memorials that follow do not propose to give an adequate account of Cunningham to any who did not know him. They have been collected rather for those who may be glad to have some little remembrance, however incomplete, of one whom they knew to be far more than any published memories can describe. In their behalf, thanks are here given to those who have contributed to this volume.

Even in editing one's own MSS., one might be forgiven if through oversight or defective memory occasional passages from other writings should be printed without sufficient acknowledgment. Though the sermons that follow have been revised with considerable care, it is possible that some mistakes of this kind may have crept in. For this, the additional difficulty of dealing with another's MSS., and these without guiding references of any kind, may be pleaded in excuse.

The Lecture on Emerson was given first in Stranraer, as one of a course in connection with the Young Men's Christian Association. It was rewritten and delivered in Bowdon to the Bowdon Wesleyan Literary Society in January 1888.

D. M.

PREFACE.

—o—

By request of friends I write a few introductory sentences by way of preface to this memorial volume.

I have read with interest the Memoir of Mr. Miller and the selected sermons. They serve in some measure to put before the public the image of a singularly gifted and winsome nature, one of the most lovable of men, taken away from us all too soon. The sketches embodied in the Memoir by old fellow-students in St. Andrews and Glasgow are true to life, and help to bring the man back to our view. I confess, indeed, to a feeling of disappointment. The picture, both of the gifts and the goodness, comes far short of that which lives in one's memory. But I do not think anything better could have been given, for lack of material in the shape of anecdotes and letters. I can add nothing of value to the account. Yet I knew Cunningham well. He was often in my house while a student in Glasgow, and occasionally afterwards when he had left the Hall. I felt the infrequency of subsequent intercourse a kind of bereavement. I often longed to

hear from him or to see him, and have a good talk, and enjoy once more that soothing voice and the mingled wisdom and humour of his conversation. I first became acquainted with him when I was a minister in Broughty-Ferry and he a student in St. Andrews. Unsettling thoughts about ecclesiastical connections due to the disturbing influence of the Patronage Bill, and possibly of the *genius loci* of St. Andrews, led him to seek counsel of me. The result was an intimacy which made him follow me to Glasgow College to study there for the ministry.

I do not know whether the general public will find aught here to interest them, but I am sure that old fellow-students of all professions, and old hearers in Inch and Bowdon, will welcome this modest memorial. Few things have struck me more than the profound attachment of the Bowdon people to a man who was with them less than two years. It is rare that a man of real depth makes his influence felt in so short a time. But Cunningham's charm was immediate. His look and voice, slightly melancholy yet not depressing, his fine literary gift, and his real wisdom, told instantaneously. I was consulted about his going there. I was not inclined to think him the man for the place, lacking as he did the physical vigour and the push and self-assertion which I fancied the position demanded. I told them he would do if they could be content to hear words of wisdom and goodness spoken by one who would not have recourse to the

methods of self-advertisement. It turned out that the gentle voice of meekness, sweetness, and light was just what was wanted, acceptable alike to those who were forward in the call and to those who hung back.

As I think of my friend's good life, and all that was in him, his early death makes me heave a sigh. Fellowship with him is one of the tender memories which break our hearts as we recall them, and bring us nearer heaven.

A. B. BRUCE.

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CHAPTER I.

ST. ANDREWS.

ROBERT TENNENT CUNNINGHAM was born at Dundee on the 31st of July 1852. From a private school, which he entered at the age of five, he went, in 1864, to the High School of Dundee, where from the beginning he was a distinguished pupil. In its annual prize lists he always stood high, and in 1869 he gained the Anderson Scholarship, which took him to St. Andrews. The student element in him found early expression; he was, even as a boy, an eager reader of all books that came in his way; and when he left school he was known to be not only a first-rate mathematician, but also unusually well read in English literature.

In November of 1869, Cunningham entered the Arts curriculum of the United College, St. Andrews. He came to the eastern university a stranger, but his name was not unknown to those who entered with him for that year. More than one, recalling that time, have testified of the expectations to which report had given rise, and their ample fulfilment in the years that followed. It was a fulfilment more than they had

thought of, for the man whom they expected to prove a scholar, proved in addition a most genial and inspiring friend. Academic friendships are more possible in St. Andrews than in a university where the classes are larger, and where, therefore, students cannot get to know each other so readily or so closely. But, such opportunities apart, it is not always that the most prominent scholar can, along with their admission of his ability, claim also the affection of his fellows. Through all his career as a student, both at St. Andrews and Glasgow, this rare fortune fell to Cunningham. The testimony that comes from all his fellow-students is uniform in this,—that their memory of him is divided between an enthusiastic pride in the trained scholarship that so early won their admiration, and the charm of the gentle, pure nature that so completely won their hearts. They think of him still as the student to whom success in all departments was so easy and so natural,—but almost more as their truest friend. Recalling those days at St. Andrews, the Rev. David H. Lawrence, now of Broughty-Ferry, writes:—

"Cunningham and I entered St. Andrews University together, he coming from the High School, Dundee, and I, along with some half-dozen others, from the Madras College, St. Andrews. His fame had preceded him, and we were curious to see the scholar who—so rumour said—was to beat us all. I remember my first sight of him. On the opening day of the session he was pointed out to me, and I looked with somewhat critical eyes on the High School dux.

There he stood, tall and slender, black-haired and pale-faced, rather delicate in appearance, and very staid in demeanour. He wore his college gown, not according to the approved student mode, loose and unfastened, but hooked across his chest. His grave look and hooked gown argued him a 'grind,' and a 'grind' I with rapid and confident judgment pronounced him. The prophecy of what he would do was fulfilled before my judgment of what he was, was discovered to be erroneous. He beat us all; but I, for the first session at least, still thought him a 'grind.' We met, of course, every day in the classes, but not much outside of them, and I did not become intimate with him till a later time. I cannot recall any precise date or any special circumstances which marked or formed the beginning of our friendship; but by our third session it had become very close. Even before this I had discovered how ludicrously erroneous was my first judgment of him,—any one more unlike a 'grind' of the typical college sort it would be hard to conceive. Cunningham was one of the most delightful companions I have ever known, full of humour and cordiality, an eminently sociable man. He worked hard, but he liked play too; he was fond of fishing, and keenly interested in golf; and the milder forms of student recreation — long walks and longer talks—had a great charm for him. He read widely beyond the range of the prescribed class subjects, and was well acquainted with the lighter as well as the more serious literature. He used to repeat with great feeling and sweet intonation favourite passages of prose and poetry; and when he was in a different mood, I have heard from him more of Artemus Ward and Bret Harte and Mark Twain, than I have ever read of these authors for

myself. He had a finely balanced mind, and was equally strong in mathematics and in literature. I think we regarded his mathematical powers as even more remarkable —as they were certainly rarer, in our set at least—than his literary. We used to speak of him as a future wrangler; and I am sure that if he had gone to Cambridge he would have fulfilled there the prophecy of his college friends, as he had fulfilled in St. Andrews the prophecy of his school friends. But I do not think that his liking for mathematics ever predominated over his liking for literature,—though I remember him 'treating' himself out of a scholarship which he had won, to an abstruse and costly book on the Calculus."

Another friend of that day, the Rev. William Proudfoot, the present minister of St. Margaret's, Arbroath, adds some lines to the above portrait of Cunningham as he seemed to those who knew him at St. Andrews :—

"He came to college with a reputation that prepared us for great things, and I can well remember the significant remark of a fellow-student made at the railway station the day before the classes met—'There's the man!' Naturally enough, the remark was not too readily accepted by the young hopefuls who heard it; but the results of the first session placed its truth beyond question. It was soon evident to us all that Robert Cunningham had a mind that could work with ease and mastery in any department of study. We regarded him as a giant in mathematics, and some of us who were remarkably feeble in that branch of academic accomplishment can never forget the kind and patient help he was always ready to give.

"But the distinguished student was also a man of most unaffected modesty. No one could ever have known about college successes from him. His manner was gentleness itself. A stranger might have thought him too quiet; but as acquaintance ripened into friendship, reserve gave place to a sort of playful *abandon*, which disclosed a heart of warm sympathies and of most genial humour. At the convivial meeting he was always enjoying and enjoyable. He had an excellent memory, and in an idle hour he would sometimes convulse a few friends with whole pages of Mark Twain—given without a smile.

"As indicating his interest in spiritual thought while still a student in Arts, I may say he was the first to direct my attention to Dr. Martineau's *Endeavours after the Christian Life*. I can go back to that quiet hour in St. Andrews and hear him read, as he read then, with deep impressiveness, the last page of that most fascinating book. Those who know the early stages of university life are aware that evidences of this high liking are altogether exceptional. As I think of it now, it seems to hint very plainly as to the sort of work that lay nearest his heart even then, mathematical first prizes and other highest honours notwithstanding."

Associated with university life there are bypaths of intellectual activity which bulk more or less largely in the interest of students. There are the different societies in which they can meet together, and discuss their different views of the questions, political, philosophical, social, or religious, that emphasize themselves in their time. For a share in these accompaniments

of student life some men are by temperament and inclination more fitted, some less. In the work of the St. Andrews societies Cunningham was not by any means uninterested; but at the meetings of the Debating Society he was oftener a listener than a speaker, and sometimes by his silence surprised those who knew him to be well fitted, if he cared, to join to some purpose in its discussions. This forms one point of interest in the reminiscences sent by another friend and fellow-student of those days, the Rev. William Lawson, of Elgin, who writes:—

"Few details of that first session dwell in my memory. Indeed, it is a pain to think how few special incidents remain from those four happy winters, when we alternately studied hard and made mirth together. He gave at the very outset the same impression as in later years, of brilliant powers, of force of character, of singular modesty, and great humour. Alongside of that also, unfortunately, there was that delicacy of constitution which never left him. He was pre-eminent in everything as it was. If he had had physical vigour, we all felt there was nothing which he might not have achieved. He was so gentle, withal, that no one grudged him his many and brilliant successes; and he had, then and always, a marvellously tolerant mind. He was tolerant not only of difference of opinion, but also patient with dulness and stupidity, and he delighted to be helpful.

"The very first evening we spent alone together in St. Andrews we had a talk about books. Cunningham was enthusiastic in his praise of the writings of Edgar Allan Poe. I am sure that I then knew nothing of Poe except that he

was the author of *The Raven.* He began to talk about Poe's prose works, and recited with weird vividness and intensity of feeling *The Fall of the House of Usher.* I can still recall my sense of horror, and the snakelike fascination of the gruesome narrative, which he gave with almost literal accuracy, and my boyish admiration for himself who knew these things, and could tell a story so well.

"In spite of his great gifts—and he was a clear and ready speaker—Cunningham did not care at first, or ever, to shine as an orator in the Literary Society. This I have been told, for I was a member of the Classical, as the rival College Debating Society was called. He needed to be drawn out, and he enjoyed watching the movements and quizzing the arguments of others. For long he had been content to be a listener, to the wonder of many who knew his reputation. One evening, in the course of debate, an older member of the Society went out of his way to say some rather severe and scornful things about the Free Church. Cunningham rose at once, and in a speech of great warmth and force defended his own position, made emphatic points against the offender, and gained golden opinions for this his maiden speech, even from those who did not belong to his own Church."

The incident of Mr. Lawson's last paragraph is a testimony to more than Cunningham's ability in debate; it is a witness as well to a quiet independence and a fine fearlessness that those who knew him later, no less than his old St. Andrews friends, will recognise as very characteristic. The loyalty which, without any unworthy narrowness, could stand up for his own

Church in circles with such strongly pronounced ecclesiastical traditions as those of St. Andrews, and where, I suppose, his position was likely to be in a small minority, was the same that always made him true to the convictions he had honestly come to, without much regard to whether many, or indeed any, might agree with him or no.

In the *British Weekly* of 21st September 1888, ten days after Cunningham's death, there appeared a short notice of him as his fellow-students knew him at St. Andrews, from the pen of the Rev. William Robertson, Sprouston, Kelso. To that Mr. Robertson has added a few sentences, and with these it is reprinted here. Following the recollections already given, it may be taken as completing the story of the St. Andrews time, and with it this chapter may fitly close :—

"It is now nearly twenty years since a cluster of youths, one gloomy November day, stood together near the ancient gateway that leads to the United College of St. Andrews. Fresh from school, they talked, as such youths will, of the coming session, and of what position they were likely to hold when brought into competition with students from other parts of the country. The reputation of one of these had preceded him. It was rumoured that the best scholar whom Dundee High School had for years sent forth was to be with them during the approaching winter, and much curiosity was aroused regarding his appearance and mental qualities. This young man, whom his future class-fellows

were so eager to see, was Robert Cunningham. To the full he justified his reputation. He was found to be all that rumour said, and more. His was a well-trained and rightly-balanced mind, which worked freely upon all subjects. Mathematics was perhaps that on which he most easily distanced all competitors; but in the study of classics, philosophy, and literature he took a leading place. Before the end of his Arts course his mind was deeply imbued with the spirit of English poetry. But he was far more than a mere student. In that grey old city, whose very dust is dear to those who have dwelt within its walls, the students are thrown together in a way not possible in the other larger university towns of Scotland, and Cunningham's friends soon learned to regard him, not merely as a scholar of whose attainments they were proud, but as one of the truest, soundest, noblest souls whom it was their lot to know. No baseness of any kind marred the purity of his nature—no meanness, no jealousy of rivals, no pride. Beneath the charm of his gentleness and *bonhomie* one forgot his unconquerable strength of will. His lack of physical energy concealed, but did not weaken, the massiveness of his character and the independence of his judgment. A shrewd yet kindly humour and a profound modesty were, perhaps, his most marked qualities in social life. Unfortunately, during his whole college course he was in weak health. At one time, through many weeks of sickness, his life hung in the balance. In due time the Arts course came to an end, and the little band of friends broke up, conscious that perhaps the happiest period of their life had closed. They went their several ways, some to be teachers, or doctors, or lawyers, most of them to be ministers. Cunningham went to attend the Free Church

Hall in Glasgow, others went to the United Presbyterian College, and some remained in St. Andrews 'to drink of St. Leonard's Well.' Cunningham was a bad correspondent. 'You may as well ask me to telegraph,' he said to a friend who, at parting, asked him if he would not write. But reports came from time to time of success in his new sphere, of recognition by his professors, of all that seemed worthy of him. No success injured the original modesty of his nature. On one occasion he went on a walking tour in the Highlands with a friend. On their return they emerged to civilisation, from the hills, at the little Perthshire town of Blairgowrie, Cunningham somewhat depressed with the thought that he might have at once to return to the drudgery of tuition. They bought an evening paper, and learned from it that he had won the highest honour of the Free Church, the Patterson Scholarship, open to all Free Church students. Reared in a pious home, whose Christian traditions he profoundly revered, Cunningham entered on his professional labours with a serious sense of the greatness of the work to which he was called. Of that work, as carried on at Bowdon, and previously at Inch, Stranraer, outsiders cannot speak. Should not some memorial of it be produced? Meanwhile, all who knew him long ago lament the untimely end of one so genial, pure, and true, and with an added sense of pain recur the words in which Andrew Lang has expressed for all alumni of St. Andrews the feelings with which they regard their Alma Mater:—

St. Andrews, by the Northern Sea,
A haunted town it is to me!
A little city, wan and grey,
The grey North Ocean girds it round,

And o'er the rocks and up the bay
  The long sea-rollers surge and sound.
And still the thin and biting spray
  Drives down the melancholy street,
And still endure and still decay
  Towers that the salt winds vainly beat.
Ghost-like and shadowy they stand,
  Dim-mirrored in the wet sea-sand.

. . . . . .

O broken minster, looking forth
  Beyond the bay, above the town,
O winter of the kindly North,
  O college of the scarlet gown,
And shining sands beside the sea,
  O stretch of links beyond the sand,
Once more I watch you, and to me
  It is as if I touched his hand!

"It is a favourite thought of Ruskin's, that in contemplating a great work of art one is impressed, not so much by the amount of strength or force expended in its composition, as by the ease with which the artist has accomplished his task. Similarly, no one could see Cunningham at work without admiring the ease, the calmness, the absence of fuss and flurry with which all he did was done. If his low square brow, so frequently associated with the brisk, active intellect, undisturbed by scruples or hesitation, was the sign of his mathematical ability, his dark and thoughtful eyes, set wide apart, were perhaps the truer index of his character. His nature was essentially poetical. If the pleasure he took in solving a mathematical problem was keen and ardent, not less so was his love of poetry, his delight in Wordsworth's revelation of nature and spiritual insight, in Keats' pagan sensuousness and wealth of phrase and epithet, or in the

pathos of an ancient ballad. Closely associated with this was another quality which I have already named, his religious reverence. From the earliest years of his student life, it is true, he found himself unable to accept the 'evangelical' creed in its narrower forms. In those years I heard him again and again express the deepest dissatisfaction with some preachers who were too apt, in their frequent attacks on agnostic scientists, to present only a string of pious platitudes in place of a reasonable defence of the Christian faith. At that time—I do not know what were the views of his maturer years—he was always ready to do battle against narrowly orthodox opinions, whether in the department of criticism or of doctrine. But at the same time, no one could for a moment doubt his real piety of heart and rightness of aim; he touched the deeper parts of religion and life with a too reverent hand for this to remain long uncertain.

"Cunningham was not by nature fitted to take a leading part in assemblages of his fellow-students, nor could he ever have cared to tickle the ears of the crowd from the platform of the rhetorician. He was essentially quiet, gentle, and unaggressive. He shrank from strife. He was never moved by vulgar ambitions. He saw the mingling of good and evil on all sides too clearly to find it easy to reach a conclusion from which all hesitation and mistrust were excluded, and thus what the poet calls 'the keen unscrupulous course, which knows no doubt, which feels no fear,' was not for him. In debating societies and other social gatherings his indifference to matters which he regarded as of small importance, and which he perhaps despised, and his disinclination to cast himself into the fray

among more reckless and combative spirits, was felt by many as a rebuke of their less sensitive conscience and less scrupulous conduct. He who had most right to speak, he whose words would have been listened to with most deference, was content to be silent; and by this gentleness, gravity, and aloofness of spirit, he perhaps impressed the more deeply on his friends a lesson too easily missed in the tumult of debate :—

> We shall not then call hardness force,
> Nor lightness wisdom any more.

Not we who have known Robert Cunningham."

CHAPTER II.

GLASGOW.

CUNNINGHAM began his divinity curriculum at the Free Church College, Glasgow, in November 1876. Having taken his Arts course at St. Andrews, he was unknown to most of those who were of his year. But among student circles he had been spoken of. It had become known that a distinguished graduate from St. Andrews was to join the first year that session, and some curiosity was aroused concerning him. Of the report that had arrived before him, Cunningham was, of course, all unconscious, and he took his place, as his manner always was, very quietly. Students are sometimes impatient of a new man, especially if he be likely to dispute places with those whom they have been accustomed to think of as the local representatives of scholarship and college honours. But Cunningham never long remained a stranger anywhere. In him was that more than scholarship that makes men friends. And so ere many weeks were over we had forgotten that he had not been with us all through, and in him and in his success we all

felt we had a real share. Some of us knew him better than others, and were associated with him in other ways than in the class and its particular work; but those who saw least of him then, equally with those who knew him best, came to take it as a matter of course that in examinations and the other work we had to do, Cunningham's place was first. And if his own work and his own mental powers put him there, it was on our part without a grudge. His success was something of which all of us were proud.

No man who knew Cunningham in any real way would ever dream of writing out details of his life in any of its stages, or of trying to catalogue the honours he won in any session or in any college. The remembrance of such a man moves along higher lines than those of prize or honour lists of any kind. And so let it be said once for all, that in the subjects which take up the time and the interest of a divinity student, he was always at home. He had thought of many of them before; and if he had an interest in a mathematical problem, as he had till the very end, he had an interest more profound in those problems of God and man, their relations and their fellowship, that renew their mystery and their fascination for every age; he had a great and deep share in "the mighty hopes which make us men." The Rev. J. T. Ferguson, of Cupar, has contributed to these Memorials a recollection of the Glasgow years to which all who studied with Cunningham will enthusiastically subscribe:—

"It is difficult at this interval of time to recall the first impression made on me by R. T. Cunningham. He entered the Hall with us in November 1876. About a score of us formed the 'year,'—as good a year, we fondly thought, as could be. Most of us, being Glasgow University men, were well acquainted with one another, but there were several besides who had previously studied elsewhere. The most conspicuous of these was Cunningham, about whom it was whispered that his course at St. Andrews had been highly distinguished, and that he had come to Glasgow attracted by one of the theological professors whose teaching was beginning to throw a lifelong spell over us. During the following winter my acquaintance with Cunningham ripened, and I felt the rare charm of his conversation. Unfortunately most of the details of the happy friendship that followed have become dim in my memory, while the whole image of the man remains, large, noble, and indelible. The tall erect figure, with its long slow stride, the well-rounded head, the dark eyes full of truth and pity, the exquisitely friendly smile which at each touch of humour broke through the otherwise impassive gravity of his face, the gentle dry sincerity of his voice in argument and anecdote, giving way to pathetic expressiveness when touched with emotion, the soothing quietude of his companionship,—those are the traits that abide with me after years of separation. In the class work he attained with seeming ease the greatest distinction, both in written examinations, which test a man's retentiveness and power of concentration, and in essays, the form of which displays the higher powers of reason and imagination. We grew to be proud of his superiority, for his humility made envy impossible; and when in the Final Exit he stood

first of all the men of the three colleges, we felt that somehow we had all scored a victory.

"In our common life outside the class he took a prominent and sympathetic part. I find his name in the lists of students acting as deputies of the Missionary Society during 1878 and 1879, and he regularly attended the Society's meetings. But it was in the Theological Society that he made the deepest mark upon his fellow-students. His name appears in the Syllabus early in 1877 as taking the affirmative side in a debate on the question, 'Are Creeds inconsistent with Theological Progress in the Church?' During his vice-presidency, two years later, he appears as the author of an essay on 'Macleod Campbell.' On the eve of his presidency, which came with the last session of his course, he delivered a memorable address on 'Theology and Life.' In this he endeavoured to state the problem of theology so as to prepare the way for a subsequent series of essays in which some of our ardent spirits joined in a crude attempt to give to the idea of the Kingdom of God its proper place in the system of doctrine. They afterwards found, as they read more widely, that the modern masters of theology in Germany had successfully attempted what they were vaguely reaching after. The effort was one that was sure to enlist Cunningham's sympathy. He had not escaped the nip of the prevailing scepticism of our time. He had held the faith through inward conflict such as many Churchmen cannot appreciate, and the discord between the actual and the ideal in religion and theology presented him with the main task of his thinking. He longed to see all his own many-sided culture and the culture of the age brought into harmony with the gospel. If he had been longer spared to the

Church, it was on this line that his best work would have been done. His geniality and the utter lack of pharisaism in the judgments that he passed upon men would have stood him in good stead here. The habit of his mind was at once singularly just and singularly tender. He knew his Carlyle and loved veracity, and he had read the Gospels for himself, and loved mercy. I recollect how gently he told me of how he had spoken his mind to an 'unfortunate' who had accosted him one night in Edinburgh, and how she had wept and thanked him for the first kind words that any man had spoken to her for years. He was one to whom nothing could come amiss. He was formed to hear confessions. He was always deeply interested in the emotional colouring of life. Such a combination of humanity in feeling with intellectual ability is seldom met with. But even in his college days there was an air of other-worldliness about him, which mingled with his rich and rare humanity in a way that eludes description.

"He never impressed us as having more than enough of physical vigour. There was no apparent effort in his work, but we felt that he ought not, as he did not need, to overstrain his powers. He was detached from conventionality as if he had felt deeply and painfully, and had looked through most things that are at all transparent. His mental elevation and remoteness from the common, with his beautiful lucidity of style, are curiously associated in my mind with visions of mountain peaks above the snow line. I remember how he chided me for suggesting such a comparison when I spoke of him to the people on the evening of his ordination at Inch. And I am reminded of a winter evening in 1878 when it fell to him to preside at a debate in the Theological Society

on the question, 'If Death were Annihilation, would our Life be worth living?' Many strong and eloquent things were said on both sides, but none who heard it will easily forget Cunningham's summing up. The gist of it, all but a few fragments of lovely illustration, has gone from me; but when I close my eyes I see again the dimly-lighted room with the venerable books of the Tischendorf's library in the shelves around us, the tall figure at the table, the intense clasp of the hands, and the far-off prophetic look of the pale face, as with tremulous voice, amid breathless silence, he spoke of the inevitable shadow that must fall on the joy and labour of life with the passing away of the hope of immortality. We all felt then that we knew what true eloquence was. And has not his own early and sudden death been a touching comment on that, the best of all his college speeches?"

To these remembrances may be appropriately added a few words sent by the Rev. Lewis Muirhead, of East Wemyss, who was for two sessions a member of our year at Glasgow. Mr. Muirhead's contribution is valuable as taking us into one of those regions outside college life proper, which, when one is trying to picture a man, have a value all their own:—

"We marvelled quite as much at the way in which he won his success as at the success itself. We knew him to be constitutionally not robust, we feared the effects upon his health of what we thought could not but be very close application to his studies, and yet none of his trophies seemed to show even the honourable tarnish of the effort that won them. I remember vividly the charming impression

produced by one of his class essays—delivered in his slow, sweet monotone—which I was sorrowfully surprised afterwards to learn had been written in excessive pain and weakness.

"Cunningham's value in every enterprise that gave promise of heightening the tone of our common aspirations in the Hall was felt by all to be supreme, but he was never the self-appointed leader in any new movement. He was glad to follow his inferiors when he thought they were leading in the right direction. During his first year in the Hall, two or three daring spirits, impregnated with Hegelian notions,—then curiously rampant among certain Glasgow students,—originated a promising, but, as the event proved, short-lived movement, the design of which was to disseminate Hegelian ideas in their special relation to theology among the uninitiated in the Hall. We met once a week, German fashion, in a hotel, and settled very deep questions over (I am glad to say) very shallow glasses of beer. Some, of course, sat in the seat of the scornful, but not so Robert Cunningham. He took his place among the humblest of the uninitiated, and his championship of leaders whom he might well have led secured an amount of respect and real profitableness to the movement, so long as it lasted, which it would hardly have won for itself. He professed to have neglected philosophical studies during his university course, but when we rose from any of our discussions it was usually felt that Cunningham, with his beautiful lucidity and unconsciously impressive slowness of utterance, had spoken the final and illumining word.

"I have deep satisfaction in closing with the remark that if Cunningham in his student life was great in his public

achievements as our *scholar* and *spiritual leader*, I sincerely believe him to have been greater still through

> That best portion of a good man's life,
> His little, nameless, unremembered acts
> Of kindness and of love.

I can easily guess what he was in relations of his life of which most of his fellow-students had no vision. I happen to *know* something of what he was in relation to one of the poorest and obscurest of his fellow-students; but these things are not written with ink."

Mr. Ferguson has referred to the idea of the Kingdom of God, and the inspiring place it had in the minds and aims of Cunningham and some of his contemporaries. A little paper is still preserved which may be called a contribution by Cunningham to the thought of the Kingdom as it presented itself to him. It is given here, not only because of this particular association, but also as an illustration of that humanity which he brought to all religious and theological questions, and in virtue of which many a thought, in ordinary treatment abstract and dry, took in his exposition living and most sympathetic form. The little paper has a pathos and a natural simplicity very suggestive to those who can recall the man as they read his words:—

"When a friend has died who filled a large place in our life, the first feeling is overpowering sadness. The soul surrenders itself to the sense of loss, and haunts the resting-place of the dead. And how can it be otherwise? For

while he lived with me, did not this friend of mine so enter into fellowship with me that in soul we were one? He made himself *me*, not by coming down to my level, but by raising me up to his. This harmony, or unity rather, was also unconscious. I mean by this that he did not merely raise me out of my true self in brief moments of communion, but that I realized my own true self only in this unity with him. Often, no doubt, I was painfully conscious of my own deficiency; but then he was always there, who could give me strength and courage. Even when absent from me I could always apply to him for help in some way or other, and get the wise sympathy which satisfied my present need. But now death has changed all this. The harmony of my life has been rudely broken up, and at first I am only conscious that one-half of myself, and that the best, has crumbled away and disappeared. I only feel my loss; all that is left me is but some grass from a grave.

"But by and by a more healthy feeling arises. Reflecting on my own state, I cannot rest satisfied with the dismemberment of my spirit. I seek to supply somehow the blank that has been created; but how is this to be done? The first effort is naturally to reproduce in thought my friend as he is retained in my memory. I call up before me his face, his look, his tones—most of all, his words. Out of these details I form for myself a simulacrum of my dead friend, which I objectify, as it were, and try to satisfy myself in some measure with it. But satisfied I cannot be; for the chief element is wanting. The sense of unity is not yet restored. This image, or picture, or whatever we may call it, cannot, as my friend once did, raise me into my real, true, higher self. It rather intensifies the sense of incompleteness

which his first loss occasioned. It makes me feel more and more how poor I myself am, compared with the words and actions of him whom memory recalls. It stands over me as a reproachful presence. To *me* the man was something more than merely what he said or did; has his power over me died with him? Time and experience, however, bring healing. I begin to find in my life that his memory simply is not all that he has left behind him. There is something more, and that something I find in myself. It was not in name merely that he made himself one with me. His thought, his spirit, he himself has entered into my thought, my spirit, into me myself; although it is only now that I become fully conscious of it, I find that in life I am continually influenced by him, who, although dead, yet liveth in *me*. In circumstances in which, when he was alive, I would have asked his counsel, I find that his self, which has entered into me, is still guiding me. I now understand the meaning of the man himself as I never did before. The original unity is once more regained; and the difference is that I am now conscious of the difference and of the unity as I never was while my friend lived. I can now see that it was good for me that my friend should be taken away, as I am enabled to rise above a mere external dependence upon him, and to retain a consciousness of harmony with him even in distinction from him, which his very presence helped to obscure.

"Do we not find something analogous to this in the case of the disciples after the death of Christ? At first it is only their loss that fills their minds. He is dead, and the world is dark. The first sign of recovery from the overwhelming sense of desolation is when they heard what seemed a voice

from heaven out of the tomb of the buried Christ—'Why seek ye the living among the dead?' Then followed the attempt to reconstruct the image of their Lord out of the memories of Him that they retained; and this image they in their grief and despair made real in a material way. But the ascension, followed by the descent of the Holy Ghost, marks the point at which they began to realize the true meaning and value of the life and death of Christ. Their experience began to unfold itself to them in its inner significance. The Spirit of Truth, in its universal movement, revealed Christ to them as they had never known Him before; not a Christ outside of them, whom they could see and touch, but within them, filling their heart and life. Then, at last, they understood what had seemed to them so mysterious in Christ's words—'It is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you.' While Christ was with them, they were in danger of making Him merely the external rule of their conduct; but now they found that His life was the principle of their living. The withdrawal of His presence was necessary, that they might not remain children, but arrive at the stature of the full-grown man in Christ Jesus. He did not leave them comfortless; He sent them the Spirit of Truth, who is the Comforter and the Sanctifier—the true Comforter, because the Sanctifier. Thus Christ was alive to them for evermore; and by the indwelling of His Spirit they were led on to perfection. Thus Paul could say, 'I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.'"

The story of Cunningham's student days would be incomplete without a word or two about the fine

humour that was so essential and so attractive a part of his nature. It is not hard for those who studied with him to recall moments in the intervals of classes when a little group gathered round him would suddenly burst out into a storm of laughter at some exquisite bit of fun he had quietly contributed, or to picture over again some incident or association of which he had given a reading brimful of most exquisite humour. This feature of the man has been noticed above; but a word or two more may be added from a recollection by the Rev. David Purves, of Gourock:—

"Another quality of his nature that endeared him to his fellow-students was his beautiful *humour*. It was simply irrepressible: it came over him at the most unlooked-for moments, and it was ever kindly and genial. Who of us that knew and loved him can forget the times when, smoking the pipe of peace by our firesides, he would recite, with the gravest countenance, some choice bit of Mark Twain; or sketch, with that marvellous power of memory which he possessed, the plot of the last good novel he had read; or tell those inimitable anecdotes that simply convulsed one, and of which he had a positively endless store? This is a very tempting side of Cunningham's nature to dilate on; but no one could possibly reproduce the peculiar flavour of his overflowing humour—so dry, and sly, and fine. It came bubbling up in his letters quite as irrepressibly as in his conversations; and one theme that often called it forth was the excuse which he had frequently to make for what he himself called his 'incurable non-correspondence.' 'It is a considerable time now,' I find him saying in one letter,

'since I have sent you a letter, and I suppose I ought to feel ashamed of myself, and ask you to pardon me, and all that sort of thing. But I regret to say that I cannot honestly do so. I fear I have become hardened, so far as failure in correspondence is concerned. But I will thank you for not abusing me, as some of my friends do, for not writing oftener. When I see their handwriting upon the back of an envelope lying on my table in the morning, I know what is coming, and try to compose my mind into a charitable, forgiving mood, and bear their bad language in a spirit of resignation. It is sometimes hard to do when they express themselves strongly; but then it is all the more creditable to me if I come through the trial meekly, so I try to feel that I am being disciplined, and to accept the dispensation properly. But I feel safe with you. You take no delight in malediction, and, I think, must be almost as long-suffering and patient as myself.'"

So, for us all, the four years in which Cunningham studied with us in Glasgow came to an end. In the Exit Examination of 1880 he headed the list of all the fourth year students of the Church, and gained the Thomson Fellowship, the highest honour of the Glasgow Hall. This enabled him to spend some months more in theological studies at Berlin. In May of 1880 he was licensed as a preacher by the Free Presbytery of Glasgow.

Of the time in Berlin, the Rev. William Fairweather, of Dunnikier, has been good enough to send me a short account, he and Cunningham having been fellow-

students there. With this we must pass from the academic period of Cunningham's life. Mr. Fairweather writes:—

"We arrived in Berlin on the 27th October 1880. Another student had given me a recommendation to an hotel, so we went there, as we thought, only for the night; but, with that geniality which was so characteristic of him, Cunningham soon got into a friendly conversation with the proprietor, the result being that we accepted an offer to board with him *en famille* for the winter.

"It was Cunningham's desire to hear Zeller, the celebrated philosopher, that took us to Berlin. As I did not attend his class, I do not recollect the particular subject of prelection that semester; but Aristotle's Ethics was one of the text-books, and at this Cunningham wrought diligently. We sat together under Weiss and Pfleiderer, the former lecturing on the Synoptic Gospels, and the latter on the History of Protestant Theology. Weiss, as was to be expected in the case of an exegete so able, had a very large attendance of students — quite 150, while only 15 or 16 attended Pfleiderer's course, 4 of these being from Scotland. On asking why so few came to listen to a man of such outstanding eminence, we received for answer: 'Sein Stoff passt nicht zum Examen!' Cunningham held strongly that this was a mistaken utilitarianism. He conceived a great admiration for Pfleiderer; bought every scrap that he had published, read as much as he could at the time, and laid up the rest for future study. The flashes of wit and satire with which this professor's lectures were interspersed appealed to his keen sense of humour, and were

often on his lips. Having a good knowledge of German, he followed the lectures with perfect intelligence, taking only very short notes in the class, and writing out in the evening the gist of what had been said.

"Much of his time was taken up with an exhaustive study of 'Julian the Apostate,' a subject chosen by him for a thesis he had to write in connection with the scholarship he had from the Free Church College of Glasgow. Modest soul that he was, he never communicated a sentence of it to any of us; but I am certain it was a very thorough piece of work.

"Cunningham knew better than most students how to work, but he also knew how to recreate. He was very far from being a mere bookworm. The Friday evenings spent at the Theological Verein were a source of great enjoyment to him, the *Wissenschaftlicher* and the *gemüthlicher Theil* being equally welcome. During the Christmas recess we had a run to Dresden, where Cunningham's feeling for art had ample scope for realization. Potsdam, too, with its wealth of historical association, was for him an attractive spot, and became the scene of a delightful Saturday excursion.

"We returned home in March 1881, in time for the delivery of his thesis in Glasgow. I shall ever cherish the memory of those happy days, and count it not the least of their charm that I was privileged to spend them in the intimate fellowship of a spirit so able, so gentle, and so pure as that of our departed friend."

CHAPTER III.

FOR THE WORK OF THE MINISTRY.

THE years whose story in the two preceding chapters has been briefly told had established Cunningham's ability as a scholar. He had the spirit and he had the faculty of a student, and he had won completely a student's success. He had amply answered to the test that university and college life bring. Another condition of things awaited him now. There is a feeling which is almost an article of faith in the popular mind, that a man who has the reputation of great learning must not have too much expected of him as a preacher. Scholarly gifts and pulpit, or even pastoral, gifts are by many authorities in our congregations considered to be mutually exclusive. It remained to be seen how Cunningham would fare in that work of the ministry for which all the previous years had been the earnest preparation. He began this work under most fortunate auspices. In the summer of 1881 he was chosen assistant to the late Rev. David Purves, Maxwelltown, Dumfries. For an

account of that time I am indebted to the Rev. David Purves, of Gourock:—

'I often feel that it greatly increased my father's happiness in the evening of his days (for it proved to be the *late* evening of them) to have his manse life and church work shared by one who was in all respects a congenial spirit. Like every other period of Cunningham's life, his time at Maxwelltown was not remarkable for any incidents that stand out in my memory or that would specially interest others. His ministrations, both in the pulpit and in the home, were deeply appreciated by all in the congregation who had the power to recognise real merit; and he brought himself, by that genuine power of friendliness which he had, into social relationship of a very close and precious kind with many of the members of the congregation. The children loved him for his playfulness and his interest in all their little life; he was a welcome guest in every social circle; and in the sick-room or house of bereavement his intense sympathy made him a very son of consolation. And these personal qualities went far to commend his preaching, which then, as later in his ministry, was of a very high order, and was much prized by those who listened to it from week to week.

"There were many points of contact between Cunningham and my father which drew them very closely to one another. My father was specially at one with him in his catholicity of spirit, his genuine humanness, and his humour. They were singularly close companions, and were on a footing of perfect confidence with each other. As they had many an earnest talk, so had they many a hearty laugh together.

I cannot refrain from recording one instance of the freedom with which they used to discuss the questions of the day, and banter each other on points in regard to which they were more at one than at variance, though they often debated them hard. It was one Saturday evening,—Cunningham asked my father what his subject was to be next day. To which he answered, that he thought of preaching from those words in the Song of Songs, 'Draw me, we will run after thee.' This led them to discuss the modern interpretation of the Song of Solomon; and in their argument my father defended the allegorical view, while Cunningham espoused the more modern view of the song as a poem in praise of pure love. After exhausting most of their arguments, my father, with a kindly twinkle of satisfaction in his eye, said —'But, Mr. Cunningham, if your view be the correct one, what is to become of those texts on which we older ministers preach so often; my text for to-morrow, for example,—how would that fall in with the love poem theory?' To which Cunningham, with the gravest face, at once replied—'Oh, it is perfectly simple: "Draw me, we will run after thee," is just, "Whistle and I'll come to ye, my lad!"' So perfectly did my father enjoy the humour of the reply, and understand the spirit in which it was given, that I have often heard him tell the story as a splendid example of a ready and witty retort.

"I cannot more fitly close my notes of Cunningham's work at Maxwelltown than by quoting from a beautiful letter which he sent me in acknowledgment of a copy of my father's 'Memoirs,' which I sent him as soon as it was published. 'Many thanks,' he writes, 'for your kind present of your father's Memoirs and Sermons. It is a book I prize very

highly, as containing some of the life and work of one of the kindest characters I ever expect to meet. It was a great blessing to me that I was thrown into his society so long. Before that time I had imbibed a distaste for, or rather, a prejudice against, orthodoxy, for the most of those with whom I had chanced to meet, who clung firmly to the traditional faith, had an element of sourness or hardness in them which was repellent. But harshness or bitterness was unknown to your father; even for those who differed most widely from him in belief, he had nothing but a good word to say. I often think of the evenings during supper-time in the manse dining-room, when we had many a close but always good-humoured discussion of some knotty theological question. I have felt myself inclined occasionally to regret that I went so far as I frequently did then; farther sometimes than my convictions actually led me, just for the sake and enjoyment of an argument. But I cannot say that I really regret having done so, for he understood me, and, I am sure, knew as well as I did when I was arguing for argument's sake. On such occasions he would eye me with a twinkle of good-humoured triumph over his face, and try to shut me up in a corner, from which, of course, I anxiously endeavoured to escape. I think it is these evenings that have impressed him most vividly upon my memory.'"

On the 27th of December 1882, Cunningham was ordained to the pastorate of the Free Church of Inch, Wigtownshire. The population of the district is entirely agricultural, and, but for the occasional passing of a train on the railway that skirts the manse garden wall, the parish is as quiet as any of

the most remote spheres in which our ministers must do their work. But I do not think that Cunningham was ever, in Inch, really lonely. From the first, many sympathies grew up around him, attachments of heart and life that are attachments still, and can never pass away. I remember how, on the evening of his ordination, in closing a speech he had made, he said, with that winning smile which meant so much—"I hope soon to make your acquaintance at your own firesides, that we may know each other as friends." These words were the promise of a relation between him and his people that received ample fulfilment in the years that followed. He was not in the least a man with any foregone conclusions as to the methods of a minister's work. Methods, indeed, as the idea ordinarily goes, were not much in his way. All through, method was a part rather lacking in him than over-developed, and it was at points where it counts for most, and is most needed, that his work was at its weakest. But if he came to his work unfamiliar with exact and methodical ways,—and in this he characteristically remained the same till the end,—he brought to it a power which is of unspeakably greater value in the attainment of moral and spiritual results, the power of sympathy. Joined to his rare insight, it was this that made him what he was as a preacher and a pastor.

The present generation has seen a great change in Scotland in the relation between a minister and his

people. He is no longer a man whose most characteristic and most congenial thoughts are on another plane than theirs,—a man to be received with a kind of distant respect, who can hardly be expected to understand the common thoughts and ways of men and women. The children of the household no longer feel it a good fortune to escape his visit, or, if they must endure it, try to hide themselves and their natural impulses and feelings as far from him as possible. So unnatural and unfruitful a relation has passed, or is quickly passing, away, and a more human, more really helpful interpretation of a minister and his work is taking its place. Cunningham was one of the men who make the transition easy, and, indeed, inevitable. He had a faculty of getting near to others without their knowing how it was. Those who met him only rarely felt the unusual interest of the man, and were glad when they chanced to meet him again; for those who were his friends, he came soon to constitute a very real part of life's impulse and inspiration. He knew all the school troubles of children, remembered all the problems that puzzled them, was interested in all their amusements; to them his visit was as welcome as to the older members of the household. It was this *humanity*, this rare faculty of understanding men and sympathizing with them, that gave him so complete a power over the hearts of his people. In their sorrows, not by any conventional words, but

by himself, their burden somehow became more tolerable; in their joys, even in the children's glee, no share could be heartier than his: and even when he was forced to think of the darker, more sinful side of human history, his sympathy was as strong as his insight was keen. In a previous chapter Mr. Ferguson has said, "he was formed to hear confessions." No description of him could be more true. He had much of that essential priestly power spoken of in the Epistle to the Hebrews, which "can bear gently with the ignorant and erring; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity." I think part at least of the charm of his thought, in the pulpit and out of it, was the idea of forgiveness, of restoration, of help to the helpless and the overcome: he was inclined to think the best rather than the worst of men; and if he must needs see the worst, and speak of it, he did not lose the power of hope, some "soul of goodness in things evil" always appealed to his sympathy. Amiel has said—"We may make the ideal a reason for contempt, but it is more beautiful to make it a reason for tenderness." Cunningham's vision was always purified by the ideal, but it led him along the "more beautiful" way. And it brought him near to men with a winsomeness they could not resist.

It is not quite easy to give an adequate description of Cunningham's preaching. The sermons that follow may be fairly taken as characteristic of his

thought and his style. But to those who did not know him or who never heard him preach something will be awanting, in the *personality* of the preacher, which printed words cannot reproduce. Those who were accustomed to listen to him will be able to recall in memory the quiet, quaint manner, the peculiar provincial intonation, which, defective as it sometimes was, none of us would have cared to change, it seemed so essential a part of the man—the occasional deliberate pauses, which in any other would have made us a little apprehensive, the fine repressed earnestness that told unmistakeably that what he preached was real to him in his own thought and his own life. It was a resolve of the beginning of his ministry that he would only speak what he knew, and testify what his own religious history had made real to him. A man who is to do his work so must be allowed to speak his own language and to follow his own way. And that was a characteristic of his ministry to the end. He did not altogether discard the old conventional phrases which the traditions of the Scottish pulpit have made familiar. But he put his own meaning into them, and filled them with living expansive force. He was not anxious to build up for his people any exact or logically complete system of doctrine. He was not rash enough to believe or to say that any theory or any number of theories could give an exhaustive or even an approximate account of divine revelation,

or of man's need of God. As he saw them, these touched each other at countless points; and of the Spirit-born you cannot predicate or calculate whence they come or whither they go. If human thought and life be fragmentary, he felt that the preaching that is to influence them best must be fragmentary too. And so you could not tell all his thought or all his faith from one sermon, or from two, or from three: it was his custom to expound Scripture as it appealed to him in the particular subject he had chosen, and he did this with all the advantage of his scholarship, and all the force of a rare knowledge of human nature, and in a style which called to its aid all his wide reading in English and other literature. If one may be allowed the distinction, his preaching was not in terms of doctrine, but in terms of truth.

He excelled in analysis of the motives and ways of men, and some of his most interesting sermons were studies in character from the history of the Old Testament or the New. But he was nowhere more at home or more inspiring than when, with singular sympathy and truth, he expounded from the Gospels the person and ministry of Christ, and the living message He had for men. Here he was always at his best. The presence of Christ in the soul of man and in human history as the closest, most living, most personal power, was the centre round which all his thought and all his teaching turned. This

thought found for itself many and most varied expressions, but it was always there. The presence in the world of the Sinless in search of the sinful, of the Strong and Patient and Pitiful seeking for the friendship of the weak and burdened, full of understanding of all the ways and wants of men—it was this gospel he unfolded with a naturalness and a reality that brought it level with the poorest and simplest life, and gave it an interest of the most persuasive kind. His preaching was undoubtedly, in the largest, most gracious, most inspiring interpretation of the words, the preaching of the gospel of Christ.

Those who have read the foregoing recollections with any discrimination will have little difficulty in making out Cunningham's attitude to present-day questions. His sympathies were all on the side of theological progress. He had the religious certainty of a man who has looked straight and hard at things for himself, and who, amid many difficulties of thought and heart, has laid hold of the things that cannot be shaken. But he was not anxious to multiply the essentials of the faith. He knew that for each heart and life truth has its own voice, its own characteristic sign, its own way by which it comes to heal and bless and inspire. He knew that there is many a real faith that has little to do with recognised creeds; and sometimes if you asked him about some particular doctrine, which many churchmen would consider the

mark of a standing or a falling Church, whether he regarded its acceptance as essential to a man's Christianity, he would reply calmly, with a quiet smile, "Oh no! I don't think so; the kingdom of truth is greater than any limits of that kind." But, withal, he was no agnostic either in thought or in word. Of the real relations between the divine and the human he was in no doubt at all. Once he was speaking to a friend of the difference between an intellectual apprehension of spiritual truth and the experimental knowledge of it that makes it part of ourselves; all at once he drew himself up to his full height, and, looking at his friend, said—"Well, I am as certain of God's personal love to me as an individual as I am of my own existence." It was this clear vision of the eternal truth behind its changing and accidental forms that made him so tolerant and sympathetic with those who, in these matters, had other standpoints than his: for tolerance is ever the virtue of those who see farthest and deepest into the ways of men and the ways of God.

The later part of the time at Inch was marked by a great deal of ill-health. He never was strong, and as the years passed his work was more and more interrupted by frequent illness. He began to think the climate did not suit him, and he repeatedly left home hoping for the restoration of change and rest. Even when he remained at his work he was often quite unequal to it. He had accepted, besides, in

1886 some literary work for Messrs. Clark of Edinburgh, the translation, in conjunction with Professor Mead, of Andover, of the *Christian Ethics* of Dr. Dorner. That this took up a good deal of his time, and was rather a burden in his illnesses, can be seen from a humorous letter which he wrote in August of that year to a friend. In it he says:—

"I have been very busy of late. I am engaged at present on some translation work for the Messrs. Clark of Edinburgh, and it is rather irksome, especially as I am being pushed to complete it as soon as possible. It is my first attempt at anything of the kind, and unfortunately I have got one of the most difficult books, I suppose, which even German theologians have ever written, to try 'my 'prentice hand' upon. It is a book on 'Christian Ethics,' by Dr. Dorner. Professor Mead, of Andover, is translating the first half, and I am occupied with the second. Dorner, I am sorry to say, has not the faintest idea of style. He twists up his sentences into a knot of clauses, and seems only to end them when he is convinced that he cannot make them still more complicated. I am often sorely tempted to relieve my feelings by standing up in my study and assailing him with the most degrading epithets I can think of. But I am always restrained when I remember that he is dead. This thought soothes and chases away my wrath, so that I can set to work again with calmness. However, to speak in all seriousness, Dorner is more than an encumbrance upon my life at present, he is a nightmare: when I sit down to write a bit of my sermon, some difficulty in his book will persist in forcing itself uninvited upon my

attention ; and, when I think of writing to a friend, Dorner is at my side in a moment, grimly inquiring if I ought not to be employed in having a wrestle with him."

Early in 1886 he had been asked to preach in Trinity Presbyterian Church, Bowdon, Cheshire, which was at that time vacant. He made a great impression on most of those who heard him, and it became likely that he would be called to be minister of the charge. But the feeling in his favour was not altogether unanimous, and difficulties arose which caused the whole matter to lie over for about six months. To Cunningham the suspense was a little trying, for from the first he had thought not altogether adversely of the possibility of a change to Bowdon. But his visit of two Sundays had meant a great deal for more than one in the congregation: and some of these had united in asking a friend, whose guest he had been during his visit, to let him know how much his services had influenced them. In reply to this he wrote a letter, which is so characteristic in various ways, that I am glad to be able to quote it here:—

"Your letter gave me great pleasure, and also made me feel rather humble. I cannot explain very well why it is, but you know it *does* make you feel humble and half-ashamed of yourself when you hear people speak warmly and sympathetically of something you have done, and most of all when it is something done for Christ's sake. I think

it is the feeling that somehow the whole thing has been done by God, and not by you. You know your own heart, your own littleness, and you are convinced that if others have got good from what you have said or done, it cannot have arisen from yourself or from your spirit touching theirs; God's Spirit has used you—that is all. And so you feel humbled when you are credited in a manner with what does not belong to you at all.

"But, all the same, I was very glad to think that I had been of some use during the time I spent at Bowdon. A clergyman does so much in the way of shooting arrows into the air, and not knowing whether they ever hit anything or not, that it is a great comfort to him when some kindly spirit like yourself lets him know that his work has not been altogether in vain. Scotch people are peculiarly reticent on religious — while willing enough to talk on theological—matters: they seem to have a certain shyness with regard to them. I think sometimes that it would be better if we were a little more open in this respect. Not to every one, by any means. I have an abhorrence—that is a strong word, perhaps, but I have written it—of people standing up before a public audience and telling what they call their 'experience.' There are *home* secrets in religion as well as outside of it, which one shrinks from making common property. I think that such disclosures are apt to engender a kind of religious gossip. But when we meet one with whom we have formed a bond of sympathy, I do not see why we should not talk of religious matters more freely than we do. So your letter was a great comfort to me; it does, I assure you, gladden me to know that through me God has been heard speaking, by some of His servants;

and it *is* pleasant to get such a letter as yours, in which a friend speaks straight out to a friend."

At last, in the end of 1886, he was elected to Bowdon; and when the call came to him in due course, he accepted it. Some of us who knew him best were a little surprised that he should have thought of it so readily as he did. But, for one thing, he hoped it would bring some improvement in his health, while there was another and perhaps a weightier reason. As he said himself, he felt the need of the stimulus that the neighbourhood of a great city, with its busy thought and life, would give. There is an echo of this feeling in a letter written in November of 1886: "One thing for which I should like to be near a great city, is the stimulus which its busy life affords, and the no less stimulating effect of contact with those who are working for God's kingdom. I do not mean that in the country one does not have intercourse with such, but there is a lack of the energy which city life supplies." I remember that at the meeting of Presbytery, in accepting the call, this was one of the chief reasons he gave for inclining to the change.

He was inducted into Bowdon on the 10th of March 1887. There were elements in the situation that made the beginning of his work there not quite easy. The call, even at last, did not include the hearty sympathy of every one. Some in the congregation were doubtful of Cunningham's suitableness

to the place and the people. It was a critical position for any minister, and it was as critical for the church. But Cunningham was a man to minimize differences rather than to accentuate them. And in what would seem to outsiders almost an incredibly short time all difficulty vanished, and to those who had felt most doubtful he himself was soon the best reason why they should put their anxieties completely away. He and his work were quickly seen to fit each other as if by a pre-established harmony.

Before many weeks had passed, those who listened to him and came into contact with him became conscious of a peculiar influence they could hardly explain. It was not simply the influence of spoken words. It was the whole style and spirit of the man. His words and his thought were, in the best sense, simple and easily understood; what he had to give was not the expression of crude opinion, nor yet of current religious experience; but rather principles he had seen and tested, made sure of for himself. Things he did not quite understand he was content to let alone. There was an unmistakeable quaint originality about his thought and his words that fascinated and inspired those who listened, at least those who listened well. Not the originality of a man who is anxious to avoid the beaten track of religious thought and religious phrase, whose chief aim is to say something new. But the originality

that has tested truth by its own particular need, and can impart it in a language all its own, with a fearlessness and a frankness that appealed to those around him in the profoundest way. The power to touch others so was not a new thing in him: it had been felt in the old St. Andrews days. It is interesting to quote just here some words of Dr. W. G. Rutherford, the head master of Westminster Public School, for the sake of their parallelism to the impression Cunningham gave so many years after at Bowdon:—

"Of all the men whom I knew at St. Andrews, I should say that Robert Cunningham was the most thoughtful. Others may have been quicker and more brilliant, but there was less of character in their thought. They had not in the same measure the faculty of awakening thought in others. A good many of the writers in whom at one time I read most were first suggested to me by him. Many a passage in poetry, history, and romance is still consecrated to me by the memory of the feeling with which he read or repeated it. He seemed to have the knack of hitting upon just those passages which most revealed the personality of the writer, and for that reason were likely to be most fruitful to other minds. Another thing I must mention—his goodness. There was nothing of narrowness in this. Indeed to some of us, not quite emancipated from the more rigid views of Calvinistic observances, there seemed at the time perhaps too little. But looking back on these St. Andrews days, I can now see how much we owed to the wide sympathetic Christian spirit of Robert Cunning-

ham. In spiritual maturity he was far before us. He had reached a higher standpoint and a truer outlook. To him it was not this part of life or that which was to be sanctified, but life as a whole in all Christian cheerfulness and honesty."

There is not one who knew him in the end who would not be glad to acknowledge the truth of Dr. Rutherford's description. It was a change in many ways from Inch to Bowdon. But the same power told alike in each. It was the genius that can tell to men at once the dream and the interpretation, that can bring into consciousness wants of soul they had hardly or only dimly recognised before, and can tell them whence these come, and what they mean, and how they can be satisfied. It was the subtle sympathy of thought that was in touch with the need and the thought and the aspiration all around him, and could put into living form feelings and forces of spirit that they could not express themselves. As he interpreted the character and history unfolded in the Old or New Testament with the utmost freedom and naturalness and insight, those who listened felt that the interest of the matter was not ancient or traditional, or in any way apart, but most living and most real and most present for them.

This was especially the case in a mission connected with the congregation carried on in Altrincham. It was a new kind of work for Cunningham. He had very real doubts as to his fitness for any share in it;

he had an honest suspicion that he would be a very imperfect evangelist indeed. And undoubtedly, if the most usual type of that form of Christian work be the only one, his fears were well grounded enough. But the ultimate qualities that evangelize men or influence them in any real way are the power to understand them and the sympathetic earnestness that brings to them a gospel intensely on a level with their needs. And this Cunningham had in an almost unique degree. A gentleman who attended the mission service regularly, and who was much interested in its success, has sent me a short note of how Cunningham appeared to him there, and it tells more than many words might say:—

"There was a mysterious something that could be clung to by, and was clinging to, all around him. The success of the mission was being hindered because it was difficult to get the fathers and young men interested; and he commenced a class *all* for them. The members were few, but that was not his fault; perhaps it owed a little to somewhat defective organization. But it was something when a man was a rare visitor at the evening mission service to have ten at a Bible class. Really at that Bible class he was in his workshop. Elaboration was not attempted, but *there* was the student who, having time after time gone over the Gospels, had no difficulty in making St. Matthew a something that was intensely on a level with Victoria Street, and very close to all of us. Some of his best sermons were worked up out of Bible-class addresses. *And the members of the class love his memory.*"

I remember meeting with the Bible class above referred to on the Sunday after Cunningham's funeral. It was not a large gathering, perhaps eight or ten; its interest was other than that of numbers. Some of the men were old, and some of them were young; there were one or two cabmen, and one or two labourers; the others, I suppose, had kindred occupations. A little bare room it was, entered by a very steep and narrow stair; it had little to commend it in the way of externals. I talked to those who were there about Cunningham. It was not very easy. And yet it did not strike me I was speaking to men I had never seen before, and might never meet again. It was a strange thing to see those old men and young with tearful eyes, and faces that told their own story of recent and irreparable loss. And yet there was something glad in it as well. As one by one they said "good-bye" when the hour was over, I knew that the firm grasp of their hand was because *he* had been their friend and mine. And then I thought of the old times that now seemed so far away, of the student whose scholarship all his teachers and all his fellows had been so quick to recognise and so ready to rejoice in. Surely so great and fruitful a combination of powers is given to few.

It need hardly be said that Cunningham's influence included far more than that of preaching. Of his friendship, of course, there were inner and there were inmost circles. Of what he was in the closest, most

sacred relations of life, of what he meant to the lives that for their gladness and their inspiration were inseparably bound up with his, these Memorials must not speak. But to all who knew him, his conversation was one of the interests of life. I believe many who met him only once have said that they can never forget him. Some of the women of the mission have borne the simple witness to him—"It was so easy to be good when Mr. Cunningham was with us;" it is believed by many among whom his latest work was done, that he did more in these short eighteen months to help upwards and to rescue those who were helplessly drifting, than most ministers are permitted to do in as many years. His understanding of men and women so well awoke a new hope within them; his generous thoughts of others was an impelling force to aid their struggle to *be* what he thought them. His goodness was not of the sort that comes for separation; it was not the higher life that discourages: it was the goodness that brought men near, and prophesied greater things, to the possibility of whose attainment it opened wide the door. And if there was something in him to bid old men hope, there was something in him also that made the children's eyes sparkle, that made their school tasks seem less heavy; he had a spirit in touch with all. Let us call it what we will, his many-sidedness, his sympathy, his humanity—to those who knew him it was greatly more than words can say.

There is a friend of mine in Bowdon who is perhaps

a little hard on clergymen. At least he looks at them with an eye entirely free from professional prejudice or professional tenderness. In any case he looks at them straight, and so his estimate of Cunningham has some kind of authority. This is what he has written:—

"Ministers as a rule are timid, rather frightened to admit anything or recognise anything that does not come within the range of the beaten track. *He* was perfectly frank in entering into any speculations that m ight be started. The inevitable bog in no way daunted him—'Well, there is no way through *yet*.' I think that he smoked tobacco was to us an advantage—at least to myself it was. It is pleasant to sit in a lull of conversation, quietly puffing,—for, say, ten minutes, —and then find that the next word—it may be on a widely different subject—is not a fresh start, but a continuation."

On the whole, Cunningham's health had been better at Bowdon than in Inch. The severe neuralgia from which he had all along suffered so much troubled him still; but it seemed as if in time it might pass away. Occasionally a change and rest seemed to help him, and he and his friends looked forward to, if not robust health, at least some measure of regained strength. He wrote comparatively so few letters, that one prizes all the more those he did write in times of holiday or times of work. I cannot help giving here an extract from a letter written to a friend in one of these breathing spaces I have referred to. He was living at the time at a Yorkshire watering-place, and the letter is largely a description of the

people he had met. It is brimful of his characteristic humour, which even illness could not check:—

"There was an old gentleman with whom I suppose I ought to have felt in sympathy, but with whom I did not. He fastened himself on to me for a day or two, but has of late left me pretty much alone. He told me that he spent a certain portion of each day in spreading the truth. I did not quite understand, but thought it prudent not to inquire further, lest I might receive fuller information than I desired. Next morning, however, I found that a tract had been slipped into my pocket, and then it dawned upon me what he meant by spreading the truth. He was a good, well-meaning man, but an awful bore. I respected him, but I found that I respected him most when I thought about him, and not when I was speaking to him, or rather not when he was speaking to me. He haunted me for a while. I would be sitting on the lawn, enjoying a pipe, and peacefully conscious of my own goodness, when I would see him some twenty yards off, coming sailing along towards me, with a benevolent smile on his face, and his pockets bulging out with tracts. And then I rose hastily and fled to the moors, a sadder and, I fear, a more sinful man than I had been a few moments before. I think he sees now that I do not relish his long laments about the degeneracy of modern preaching, because his manner towards me has become very reserved—in fact, 'cold as h-ice,' to use his own expression with regard to a sermon he heard the other day in Ilkley."

So matters went on; and Cunningham and the congregation were full of hope for the future, which

seemed to hold for all a store of great and good things to come. To all these hopes September of 1888 brought a fearfully sudden end. He had just returned from a holiday at Blackpool, and had been saying to many of his friends that he had not felt so well for years. The meeting of the Manchester Presbytery was to be held in Manchester on the 10th of September. That day he was in the best of health and spirits, and after dinner prepared to go to Manchester by an afternoon train. He spent some time in looking for some little thing he wished to take with him, and having at last found it he called "Good-bye" to his mother, who was up-stairs, and went out. As she looked from the window she saw him step aside for a moment on the grass plot to stroke kindly a little kitten that was sitting in the sun. It was her last sight of him in this world. Surely not altogether an unfitting one!

In the meeting of Presbytery he complained to one of his elders who sat by him of a feeling of closeness, and almost immediately became unconscious. Willing hands carried him to another room, and everything was done that could be; but in a very few minutes all was over. Not very long before, speaking of a friend who had passed away suddenly, he had said to some one that that was how he would wish to die: and now the end had come to him that he would have chosen. The cause of death was pronounced to be *angina pectoris;* but his constitution was almost

wholly outworn. It was a wonder he had been able to work so long and so well.

No one who was present will ever forget the day of his funeral. It was a day of mourning, not for any small circle, such as that described by the ordinary limits of friendship or the membership of a congregation,—a whole region, a whole community was most really bowed down in heart. All in Bowdon who knew him in any way, with them many others in north and south and east and west, were broken-hearted for those who in sudden and desolating sorrow had lost the light of life that never could shine again —for them many hearts were weeping; but who of those that had ever known him did not also weep for themselves, as they remembered how strangely poor the world was with him away? I do not expect ever to see a day like that again. It meant this: that Cunningham's work was not to be reckoned at all by the months of his ministry, nor by the bounds of his own particular Church; his tragic death had brought into visible testimony for one moment the influence that had spread so widely and must be working still. There we leave it with God's hand to guide it to His kingdom's end. And wherever it is, it must be a memory of most genuine and most humble ability, of an utter freedom from any disfigurement of petty unworthy estimates of men and things, of an interest in human life whose horizon was practically without limit within the great circle of loving-kindness and truth.

A marble tablet in the porch of the Free Church of Inch tells us that "he being dead, yet speaketh;" in Bowdon churchyard a cross of grey granite bears the simple inscription—"He walked with God." They tell us, too,—these stones,—that physical law has no favourites; that the fairest blossom of human worth has in it no protective element to turn aside decay and blight any more than the rankest weed that grows, not for good, but for ill. There is a sovereignty in God's kingdom with which we must not argue, to which we can only assent. There are other needs than the needs of this world, and their conditions are of "the secret things" that "belong unto the Lord our God." We think wistfully of our absent friend, and of the work we had hoped would increase with increasing years; many who knew him may perchance remember him more wistfully still amid difficulties from which perhaps the Church is not very far, for while his ability and his heart were with the advancing truth, he had a sympathy with other viewpoints which made bitterness well-nigh impossible. Yet this remains to us all, and for it all who ever knew him may well thank God,—with us there are many lives still, in many different places, and amid many different possibilities of work, that but for what he was would be far other and far poorer than they are.

DAVID MILLER.

STRANRAER, *Easter*, 1890.

SERMONS.

I.

LOST THINGS FOUND.

LUKE XV. 1–10.

IN the time of Christ, the two chief classes in Jewish society were the Pharisees and the Sadducees. With the Sadducees He did not come much into contact privately. He met them on the streets or in the fields, and talked to them sometimes when they put questions to Him or tried to overthrow Him in some discussion. He did not seek to avoid them, but as a class they rather avoided Him. They belonged to the upper circles of society, and were for the most part fashionable worldly people, who kept up the decencies of religion, but had little religion in their hearts. So they did not care to have personal intercourse with Christ. His birth was against Him, so was His poverty; and the aristocratic Sadducees ignored Him as much as possible. The Pharisees did, however, take a deep interest in Christ. They were the religious leaders of the Jews—those whose piety was known, respected, and imitated by the people. They could not allow this new religious

Teacher to go unnoticed. So they sought His society, invited Him to their houses, and listened attentively to His words. It was only when they discovered that they could not make a Pharisee of Him, that His teaching was altogether different from theirs;—it was only then that the Pharisees became His most pronounced enemies. And Christ had no wish to shun their society. He was anxious to have the Pharisees as His friends, although He would not do a single deed or say a single word that was not right in order to humour their prejudices. So He went to their houses, sat down at their tables, and made Himself as friendly as possible with them. But there was one thing that astonished the Pharisees, and which they could not get over. Christ was as friendly with publicans and sinners as He was with them. One day He dined with some Pharisee whose piety was established, and known over all the town; the next He sat at the table of Zaccheus the publican, whose roguery had become a byword; or He was seen side by side with the woman who had washed His feet with her tears. He was a guest in all sorts of disreputable places. It was no wonder that the Pharisees were amazed. What would we think of a religious teacher who was to be met with, not only in the society of those whose character stood high among their fellow-men, but also among the most profligate of mankind, notorious evil-doers, both rich and poor? I suspect our amazement and our condemnation would

be just as great as was that of the Pharisees of old. And yet, if Christ were to appear among us again, He would do now just what He did then, and frequent the company of all who cared to have Him among them, whatever their character might be. But it is worthy of notice, that, surprised as the Pharisees were, they never attempted to explain Christ's conduct by saying that He was as bad as the publicans and sinners with whom He consorted. They did not believe Him to be sinless, but they never ventured to hint that He was depraved. They could not but acknowledge that He was far above the company He kept. This fact only served to increase their astonishment. It was not because He was avaricious that He sought the society of the rapacious publicans, nor because He was impure that He loved to talk with sinners. What could His motive be? The Pharisees could not tell: they felt quite nonplussed by His behaviour. At the very least, they said, it was surely a low taste on His part that made Him actually prefer the society of the ungodly to their own decorous conversation and rigid propriety. So they often spoke to Christ's disciples, and asked them why it was their Master received sinners and ate with them. The disciples could not explain the matter any more than the Pharisees. "You must ask Jesus Himself," they said, "we do not know."

Christ felt that the surprise of the people was natural. His conduct was new and strange, the like

of it had never been seen before: He ought to give explanation of it, and justify His action. For this purpose He spoke the three parables that are recorded in the fifteenth chapter of Luke. His defence of Himself amounted to this—you hate the sinful, God loves them; I am the Son of God, and love them too, —I wish to save them. That is why you see me so often among them. I am the shepherd seeking his lost sheep: the woman seeking the lost piece of money.

An old Roman philosopher was in the habit of dining at the same table with his slaves. When asked why he forgot his dignity so far as to do this, he replied—"I dine with some of them, because they are worthy of it; I dine with the rest that they may become worthy." A noble answer it was, for he did occasionally what the Saviour did all His life long. He was to be found in the company of the sinful, because He wished to see them sons of God. This was the task at which He laboured from morning to night, for which He spared Himself no toil, and in which He never grew weary. And at last He laid down His life to get it accomplished, to rescue fallen men and women from the power and the dominion of sin—in a word, to save the lost. This was the defence, then, which Christ made for His strange solicitude over reckless, profligate, careless people. Let us observe for a little the fundamental teaching of these two parables.

I. In the *first* place, we learn that the loss of a soul is a loss to God. God feels Himself to be so much the poorer by every soul of man that goes astray. When I say that He feels He is poorer, I do not mean only that He misses your work, that He finds you to be an unprofitable servant who is of no use to Him. There is more than this in the loss you inflict on God by your sin; it is the loss of your love to Him, the rejection of His love for you, that goes to His heart. Not only that He is deprived of your labour here in His service; God cares for *us* more than for our work. When the father received back again the prodigal who had been so long away, he rejoiced not that he had got another workman upon his farm, but that he had got back his son. Such is the feeling that God has to every human being. Do not think of Him as one who is indifferent to the loss of your soul, or can ever become so. Do not think that He is a Being who banishes sinners into exile with entire equanimity, without it costing Him a single pang. The very opposite of this is the truth. Rather than say that God will exclude with indifference any single sinner out of heaven, it would be a truer thing to say that He will never feel that He has been compensated for the loss of any one soul. Every one who turns away from God is sinning against a heart that is beating with the kindest feelings towards him, is sinning against the best thing that the whole universe can show—the love of

God. He marks your first defection from Him, the coldness that is growing up slowly between you and Him, as a father marks with increasing anxiety the signs that tell him his son is going wrong — the indifference to affectionate warning, the sullenness under parental reproof. You can go on in sin if you choose, you have that liberty, which no one can take from you—go deeper still, go down to the lowest depths, drink the cup to its last dregs, cast the image of God that is stamped upon your soul in the dust, drag it through every foul pit of sin if you like, until it is rotten through and through; you can destroy much, your sense of shame, your reverence for what is sacred, your respect for what is pure; but there is one thing you cannot destroy—God's love for your defaced and degraded soul. The loss of it is His loss no less than your own.

There are some things whose loss does not affect us very much. We can easily fill up their place with other things which serve our purpose just as well. It may cost us some time or some money to do so, and we regret the expenditure of the one and the other, but that is all, we do not feel the want of the very thing which went amissing. But this is not the way in which God regards you and me. We each fill a special place in His affections, and no one but we could fill these. He loves us as if we were His only children. I do not know how it has come about, but if you inquire you will find it to be a very

prevalent notion that God has a vague love for us, with little depth in it. We have the idea that if only a certain number were saved it would not matter much to God who they were; that in His sight one is just as good as another; and if heaven were filled, so to speak, then all that He cares for would be secured. But, brethren, if such be our idea of God, then Christ has been speaking these parables to us in vain. Why does He speak of one sheep, of one piece of money, of one son that has turned out ill? Why, but to teach us that each one of us has a special value for God. He has need of you and of me, just as much as He had need of Paul or John. We have each our place to fill, and no one can fill it so well as we. And we have each our special place in God's heart, and are loved by Him in a way that no one else is loved. A father loves all his children, and each of them, with a love peculiar to himself. Should one die, there is a blank in the family circle that can never be filled again. And should you be lost, there is a vacant place in the heart of God that no one of the redeemed can fill. There is an old Church legend —how it has arisen I cannot say—which shows what a deep, true sense the early Church possessed of this close personal love of God for every one of us. There was a young monk, it is said, called Theocritus, remarkable for the constant praise which he sang to God. One day an old brother-monk said to him— "Your song of praise, Theocritus, is as sweet in God's

ear as the hymn which the pope sings at Rome with all the Church." "Ah," replied Theocritus, "my praise is poor; I wish that I could once only adore Him with that great thanksgiving which the pope offers, then I would be content to die." Then the archangel Gabriel came down from heaven and took the form of Theocritus, and did his daily duty, while Theocritus was carried away to Rome, where he shortly afterwards became pope, and rendered up his tribute of devotion to God. But God said, I hear the praises of the Church as they are wont to be sung, I hear the hymn of my servant Gabriel, but I hear not the song I once heard from my servant Theocritus. I miss that little tribute of human praise. So, at God's command, Gabriel was sent to fill the chair of the pope at Rome, and Theocritus was brought back again to his humble cell, that God's ear might be gladdened with his old song of praise. It is only a legend, but it is true to the very life. The adoration of the archangel could not make up for the want of the little human praise which God loved to hear. And no one in earth or heaven can fill the place for which God has created you. God could create an archangel and put him into your room to do your work, and serve Him in place of you. But still your place would be empty. God loves you, and if you are absent at the last, no one else can fill the blank that your loss has made. Nor will God's sorrow over the loss of a sinner be taken away by the salvation of

many others. He may see thousands of others entering His kingdom, but there is always something wanting so long as one remains outside. It is poor comfort to a mother, grieving over a son who has gone wrong, to remind her that all the others are doing well. Every human soul is of unspeakable value, of priceless worth, in the eyes of God. No father, no friend, loves him better than his Father in heaven. Was not the explanation which Christ gave of His ministry among publicans and sinners clear and reasonable? The Pharisees had no pity for them. But Christ said, God loves them as much as He loves you. Do you wonder, then, that I care for them as much as I care for you? They are perishing fast, and every one that is lost is a loss to God.

II. In the *second* place, these parables teach us that God has an altogether peculiar interest in the lost. The very fact that they are lost forms a special tie between Him and them. The shepherd leaves his ninety and nine sheep in the fold in order to go out after the one that has strayed. The woman lays down her nine pieces of silver in order to search for the one that is missing. For the time being, the one sheep is of more value than the ninety and nine—the shepherd forgets all about them; he is thinking only of the one, as he strains his eyes and gazes over the barren hill-sides, searching until he finds it. This feeling is natural to us all. We are interested in a

thing that is lost, just because it is lost. We do not need to give any other explanation of the anxiety we show about it. Nor did Christ give any other explanation of God's anxiety with regard to sinners. He had lost them, that was a sufficient reason why He should persistently seek for them.

A demand was made upon God's love, as if sin had thrown out the challenge—Yes, you love men so long as they are obedient to you and do your will; but what will you do when men refuse your love, and turn against you? And God replied, I will go out after them, and seek them, and entreat them to return; though they slay me for it, I will not forsake them—my love is stronger than their sin. This is Christ's last appeal to sinners. If anything will have power on earth to draw them to God, this will. The old story—which is so old now that our foolish hearts are crying out for something new, saying that they are weary of what they have known so long. But have we known it, have we believed it? That our sin has only made God take a deeper interest in us, has only made His love all the stronger, all the more anxious; that God this day is watching your progress—progress upward or progress downward—as if your happiness and His were bound up together. This is not usually the thought of sinners. They are willing to admit that their loss is a loss to themselves, a loss of good and happiness; but they seldom think that their loss is a loss to Christ too. In much the same

spirit you may have heard a prodigal from his earthly parents speak of his sin and suffering in some such way as—Well, after all, it is my own affair. If I sin, I alone bear the brunt of it; it makes no difference to any one but myself. He says this; yet if he had only the heart to see it, he would know that it did make a vast difference to others beside himself,—to the father whose hair is turning grey before its time with sorrow; to the mother who cannot sleep at nights for thinking and praying for her lost son. What is all his suffering compared with that of those who truly love him? And what, after all, is the sinner's loss to himself compared with what it is to Christ? We pity the man whom we see going recklessly down the broad way with the sure ending, but we may well be grieved too when we think of the pain that he is giving to the Saviour. This is the strange, sad result of our sin. We grow more callous, more indifferent to God: and all the while His anxious love is growing sharper and more intense as He sees us passing away out of reach altogether. It is like what we experience when we stand beside one whom we care for, and the dreadful suspicion begins to break upon us that the shadow of approaching death is falling around him. It is a great, comforting, saddening truth which Christ teaches us here, that our very sin, instead of driving God away from us in disgust and anger, has only increased the strength of His redeeming love. Let no one, therefore, think to excuse his sin by

saying that no one cares for him. God cares. It is not men who are knocking at Christ's door, which is barred and bolted against them in some mysterious way: it is Christ who is knocking at the door which they shut against Him in their own self-will. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me."

Now, it is not hard to understand why Christ was so often to be found among publicans and sinners. They were folk who had sinned very grievously. Well, if God has a special anxiety over those whom He sees slipping away from Him into deeper and deeper sin, where should the Son of God be seen but among the worst specimens of humanity? And what a wonderful power He exercised over them! They liked to meet Him and speak to Him. Pure though He was, they did not feel disconcerted in His company. And yet He never by word or deed encouraged their sin. Here was Christ, spotless as the driven snow, sitting among profligate men and sinful women, talking to them whenever an opportunity offered, of the kingdom of God, of purity and holiness, and yet they liked His society and sought it. It is not usual that the sinful and the good meet on these terms. But in Christ they recognised One who saw them through and through, who condemned their sin, yet loved themselves; who sympathized with them with all His heart; who knew what their life had been, and yet

could feel for our poor, frail, tempted humanity. Before His gracious face they felt as we shall do in the presence of God at last. He was One who knew all their life from beginning to end, who took everything into account, and whose love only rose all the higher and swept away every barrier that their sin had raised.

In conclusion, glance for a moment at these wonderful, deathless words: "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." Christ repeats it twice over that we may not forget it. The conversion of a sinner may give joy to some of his nearest friends on earth, but in few cases will it excite much interest outside a small circle. But when we turn from this world to heaven and its inhabitants, we learn from Christ what a deep emotion is awakened there. A single repentant sinner calls it forth. What must be the value of the soul of the worst sinner on earth when its salvation wakes up the joy of heaven? This, as I have said, is the last and strongest appeal that Christ makes. We have it in our power to make glad the heart of God: shall we listen to that appeal, or coldly pass it by? Brethren, these two parables contain a gospel for every one, but most of all, I think, for great sinners—those who have sinned most deeply. Over whom will the greatest joy be shown in heaven? When does the shepherd experience the most delight? Is it not when he has had a weary search, and at last discovers

the wandering sheep? His pleasure is much keener than when he recovers one that has strayed only a yard or two from the door of the fold. And there is no joy on earth to compare with the parents' joy when the prodigal son comes back whom they had begun to despair of altogether.

A number of years ago there was a rumour current for a little, that an old sailor who had accompanied Franklin in his last, ill-fated expedition to the North Pole had found his way back again from the northern snows—the only one who was left. Had that rumour proved true, what a stir it would have caused!—the news of it would have spread quickly over the world; people would have come long distances to look upon his face, and grasp his hand, and bid him welcome to his native land again. Would there not have been more joy over him than over ninety and nine sailors who had escaped the perils of the sea? Such is the joy that the angels feel when they see one who has grown old and hardened in sin at last recovered and brought back to Christ.

What is the practical end of these parables which we have been considering? It is this. There may be one here who is troubled by some evil habit that he has allowed to get the better of him; who is fighting against it, but is often defeated; who seems to himself to be making little headway against it. He is sometimes tempted to give up the struggle, and envies those who are different from him, and never

seem to feel the power of those sins that are so strong over him. Well, remember this at least, and I know of nothing that will give you greater confidence: God is watching you, not indifferently, but with eager interest. He is watching you in your hard battle with a hundredfold greater interest than He takes in the easy righteousness of the naturally pure. And to those who have sinned so long and so desperately that they feel they are sinners of no common stamp, but of the deepest dye, and to whom the thought of God is only a thought of terror, to them this is to be said—Do not misjudge God: His love to you is as great as ever it was, His mercy has grown with your sin; come to Him and lay your burden before Him, just as in years long gone you sobbed out your first fault on your mother's breast, and there will be joy in heaven over your repentance and return.

II.

THE RENT VEIL.

"And the veil of the temple was rent in twain, from the top to the bottom."—MARK xv. 38.

THE verse of Scripture which forms our text for this morning comes suddenly and unexpectedly into the Gospel narrative. Nothing, up to this point, has been said regarding the temple, much less the veil of the temple. We have been reading the account of the death of the Son of God. That was the greatest event that had ever taken place in human history; and succeeding ages, to the end of the world, will never witness another like it. Those who were standing around the cross and saw Jesus die, observed in it, for the most part, little but what they were accustomed to. It was not an uncommon thing for a malefactor to be put to death by crucifixion. Robbers of the stamp of Barabbas were frequently got rid of in this way. And in the eyes of the Roman soldiers, of the priests, and of the majority of the people, Jesus was but a criminal undergoing the last sentence of the law. The disciples who stood here and there,

stupefied and bewildered, felt that the Master they loved was dying, and they could not save Him; His mother felt that all the hopes she had cherished for her Son were passing away like a dream. But to us the death of Christ has an interest far exceeding what it had even to those who knew Him best. To the eyes of Christians it is an event upon which were suspended the destinies of the redeemed to all eternity. The ages that preceded Christ looked forward to it wistfully, hopefully; and the Christian Church, ever since that day, has looked back to it as the day of its deliverance.

As we read the words in which Mark describes the scene, there suddenly drops into the middle of the pathetic story this verse, "and the veil of the temple was rent in twain, from the top to the bottom." It seems a trifling incident to record in such a solemn place. That an ancient curtain, worn out in the lapse of years, should be torn,—what is there in that to excite surprise, or be thought worthy of notice, especially at such a time? It had nothing to do with the crucifixion, as the cross, and the nails, and the sponge, and the spear had. Had the cross been broken to pieces at the moment the spirit of the Son of God fled from the wasted and suffering body, had the spear which pierced His side been shivered in the hand of the soldier who held it, then we might think such incidents sufficiently remarkable to merit the notice of the evangelist. But what had the curtain of the

temple to do with the death of Christ? And having once suddenly mentioned it, Mark as suddenly leaves it, to resume his narrative of the crucifixion. He gives us no hint of what led him to speak about it. The other evangelists, Matthew and Luke, who draw our attention to the rending of the temple veil, notice other strange incidents that accompanied it. There was darkness over all the earth, the sun was darkened, the earth did quake, and the rocks rent: and the graves were opened. These were wonderful events truly: all nature sympathized with the agony of the Son of Man. But was it remarkable that after the confusion and terror were over, when men came to look at the temple veil, they found that worn old symbol rent? It must have seemed so to Mark, for he passes by in silence all the other marvels, and has eyes and lips for this one alone. We shall attempt this morning to understand why this occurrence excited such interest and emotion in the writer, that the other strange portents which took place seemed to him to be of little importance in comparison with this one.

I. In the *first* place, *the whole worship and ritual of the Jews was like a volume of pictures, by which they were taught spiritual truths.* They had to be taught what sin is, and holiness, just as you teach children the difference between right and wrong. You cannot convey anything to the mind of a child by the same means you would employ in the case of his father or

mother. You show him pictures of what you wish to teach him, and interest him in these. Perhaps they are not very good pictures, and the ideas the child gets from them are not very correct; but you know that they are the best things for him. If you had not used the pictures, you could not have taught him at all. By and by, as he gets older, he will be able to understand you without them, but in the meantime he cannot get on without them. God taught the children of Israel in this way. The forms of worship which He instituted among them were pictures of Christ. Very imperfect they were, every one of them. God could have given them more correct ones, but they would not have served their purpose so well. A child will get more instruction out of some rough drawing in a childish picture-book than from a painting by a skilled artist. And so that simple sign of the veil that hung in the temple effectively taught the Jews the exceeding sinfulness of sin. Let us accompany a Jew as he goes to worship God and have his sins blotted out before the tabernacle some morning in the wilderness, and you will understand how impressively the lesson was carried home to his conscience and heart. He comes to a large enclosed space, surrounded by linen curtains of open network. He enters within the enclosure at a part where the curtain can be lifted. He is now inside the court, and before him is the tabernacle itself. But now he has advanced as far as he is permitted to go. Within

the tabernacle where God dwells he must not come. The veil told the Jews that there was a barrier between them and God, and that that barrier was sin. That was the meaning of the symbol. How impressively it spoke to them in its bare simplicity! The barrier which the Jews saw was a weak one, only a curtain, indeed, which a child's hand could have pushed easily aside, but it was not disturbed. Fear and awe restrained them. They felt as they gazed upon it somewhat of the same awe that falls upon us as we stand outside the chamber of death, and know that a few feet away there is a visitor, stronger than any human power, unseen but terribly real. What a majesty there was in that veil! Its very weakness only brought out all the more vividly the purity of God. It stood in the way of the Israelite as strong as the huge iron door of a grim fortress. On the one side of it was holiness, on the other side was sin. So it became to the Hebrews the type of these two solemn facts. It spoke to them of their sinfulness, which barred their access to God. It spoke to them of the holiness of the Lord, which the weakest among them could thrust aside and disregard, but only at the penalty of death. It was an impressive symbol, sad, yet fitting.

As the veil hung in the tabernacle, so it remained throughout the temple worship down to the time of Christ. The nation grew old, and many of its ancient customs died out, but this lived on. The veil still hung suspended before the eyes of every wor-

shipper, to tell him that the centuries had brought him no nearer to his God. As time rolled on, many a pious Jew would look at it, and wonder if the time would ever come when it should be taken away. He came into the outer court and gave his offering; he saw the veil put aside for a moment as the priest entered behind, then it fell again and left him still on the outside. Still here with his sin—was he never to get to God?

Brethren, there is nothing to hinder us this morning from coming face to face with God in worship—no outward symbol that sets a barrier to us, past which we dare not go. But though the veil has been taken away, that still remains of which the veil was but the picture. We are sinners no less than the Jewish worshippers of old. Our sin hangs as a thick curtain between us and the purity of God. Have we ever felt that this veil is there, over our hearts — no delusion, but an awful fact? It is, indeed, the most fundamental of all truths—that which we must start with. Here a beginning is made with us by God. It is when we stand on this side of the veil of sin,—God on the other side, and it between us,—it is when we stand here that Christ speaks to us. He speaks to sinners, and to sinners alone. We rejoice in Christ's salvation; and on this day, if on any day of the year, it is meet that we should be glad at heart,—the day on which we celebrate the grace of our dying Lord, and eat the bread and drink the wine which are the

symbols of redemption. It is right, I say, that we should be glad on this day. But can we feel the full joy of salvation rise like the swelling tide in our soul, if we have not first felt the sorrow, the desolation, of the separation that sin has made between us and God? The evangelist saw, with a thrill of exultation, the veil lying rent upon the ground, for he knew that sin was vanquished at last. A load was taken off his heart, a load that had lain upon his heart and upon that of every pious Jew. The blood of bulls and of goats had flowed like a red river for hundreds of years, but man and his God were still where they were at first, the one outside the veil, the other within, unseen, unapproachable, unreconciled. No wonder that the soul of Mark was filled with a holy joy when he saw the curtain in the dust, and the Holy of Holies revealed to every eye. The meaning of the cross on Calvary suddenly flashed upon him. At last God and man were at peace: the death of Christ had taken the veil away. So he writes down that sentence which is our text to-day, writes it down with a grateful heart, to tell you and me, and all the heavy laden, that the shadow of sin has been lifted from the world. But would Mark have written these words had he not felt that veil to be a burden and a sorrow? No; the Bible would have been without this verse. And how can we share in his joy, if we have not felt our sin to be a curse and a desolation? We talk lightly and easily of salvation in Christ; but let us ask this

question, each at his own heart—Is our sin such a grief to us that it is a real joy that Christ takes it away? Have we stood before that veil and seen it, and mourned before it; have we felt its shame; have we known its terrors? Or does it give us little trouble; is there no sin that is a heart-break to us; have we never felt the distress of our separation from God? Have we seen that veil and known its curse? What strange thoughts would a man like Mark have when he came to the temple to pay his morning sacrifice and gazed upon the veil! Across its surface went flitting before his eyes the phantoms of his past life. A long procession of pictures, some dim with age, others bright with the colours of yesterday's sin. Memory woke up slowly, and threw on the folds of the curtain the deeds of evil that she had not allowed to perish, but kept stored up in her chambers, and now brought out to torture the mind of the worshipper. Thoughts even that had never been permitted to become deeds, but had been loved and nourished and caressed in secret, appeared on the screen. The veil was to Mark a terrible reality; no dead piece of cloth merely, but alive and instinct with the remorse and shame of his past life.

And, brethren, some such experience is surely ours in all our services—the best among us, as well as the most sin-defiled. Have we never found our praise grow suddenly cold, or the words of prayer checked upon our very lips, when memory whispered in our ear

some word or deed that we had forgotten for a while? A veil falls between us and God, the veil of a sinful life. Day by day we are weaving it, and upon it many a strange and sad pattern is growing into shape. Our busy hands and brains are ever at work; the shuttle is flying fast as our lives go on. We are each weaving that veil, which is our soul's loss, and sinning ourselves farther from God. Is this a burden and a sorrow to us? Can we stretch out our hand to the evangelist Mark and say—Yes, you are feeling what I feel, the sorrow of your life is the sorrow of mine,—that dreadful veil which I cannot touch, now that I have made it, and which hides God from me. "The pure in heart shall see God." But I at least am not pure, and my sin has made me blind, so that God I cannot see. Have we seen that veil? Have we mourned over it, and refused to be comforted? Such thoughts as these are not inappropriate on such a day as this, a day of gladness and communion. Nay, they are fitting above all others, for out of a godly sorrow such as this the present joy will spring. Bunyan's pilgrim had his sweetest experiences of the grace of God when in distress over his own weakness and transgressions. The depths and the heights of Christian experiences lie close together. There is no better place to seek God, no surer place to find Him, than in some valley of humiliation. The veil of the temple—let us take our stand before it, along with the great company of those who in all ages have mourned over their sin.

II. In the *second* place, the rending of the temple veil signifies that *the death of Christ can take the barrier of sin away.* It is broken; the veil is rent; there is a way for us to God, a living way, for whomsoever will tread it. This is the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is a gospel that wounds before it heals, that humbles before it exalts, that strikes us down with a conviction of sin before it lifts us up with the assurance of forgiveness. It is glad tidings to know that Christ has opened this way; but what good will it do to know it if we do not tread it? It might as well be closed. If we do not enter through the rent veil, it might as well hang there for ever. If we do not approach God for forgiveness in Christ, He might as well, so far as we are concerned, never have suffered. It is Christ alone who has this power. No one but He can remove the veil which we have woven for ourselves, upon which we have spent so much of our time and strength. We cannot even take a single thread out of its texture. I need not refer to our great sins, it is sufficient to speak of the small ones. We sin greatly now and then, we sin lightly and thoughtlessly every day. And what smallest sin of yours can any power in earth or heaven take away, save that of Christ alone? It is only a thought, a wish, may be, that has risen like a small cloud in the sky; but it hides the face of the sun—it is between you and God. All your sorrow for it is unavailing; you may confess it to a friend, but that will not take

it away; you may mourn over it in secret, but as you rise to go about your daily work it goes with you, following you like your own shadow. There is a lake in Switzerland shut in by high mountains, a solitary, lonely place, which few travellers visit, and where few care to linger, so desolate and homeless is the spot. Here, an old legend says, every night at midnight the watcher may see the ghost of Pilate come to the shore and try, with piteous lamentations, to wash from his hands some red stains that are upon them—the marks of the blood of Christ. But as fast as he washes them off they reappear. So it is with all our sins, small and great. We cannot shake them off, try as we may; they cling to us like ivy round some old tree; and neither man nor angel can help us here. In this extremity we turn to the rent veil, and read there words of hope and cheer. It points us to the cross of Christ, and says, There is your help found. Take hold of the outstretched hand of the crucified Christ, and lay all your fear and remorse aside. The one person in all the universe who can break the barrier between you and God is your friend. But we must take Him as our friend, you for yours, I for mine. It will not do for us just to say—Yes, He is the Saviour of sinners. We must each, one by one, take a journey to the cross alone, and meet with Christ there. It is night-time when we approach it, our souls are dark and sad. It is not the priests, nor the soldiers, nor the mocking crowd that we hear when we come to the place called

Calvary. They and their words have long since passed into silence. It is the voices that arise in our own hearts,—fiendish voices that would fain hold us back, and tell us that no salvation is to be found for us. These are in our ears. As we toil up that hard hill, and reach its summit, of the three crosses only one is left, the one in the midst, left for all time to come for the salvation of men. We are alone there with Christ. We kneel before His solitary cross; we see that His blood has been poured out for us. In the darkness we stretch out the feeble hands of faith, and pray that the veil may be withdrawn, the shadow lifted from off our soul. And, lo! even as we pray, our scarlet sins become white as snow. This is the power of the cross of Christ, its power in the heart of every believer. Have we not known it? Do you ask how this has been done? I cannot tell you; God's ways are too deep for me. We cannot tell how the death of Christ has accomplished all this,—it is a mystery of mercy that we can never fathom,—we only see some short way into it here and there. But one thing we know,—the veil is rent, and we are at peace with God. There, with its dark impenetrable folds, it said, "There is no road for you to God." But the rent which divided it from the top to the bottom was like the parting of a dark cloud, which revealed the bright heaven that lay beyond. It said, "The barrier is broken, the veil is removed, the way to God is free." It was a signal of triumph and joy, of the

reconciliation of God and sinful men. Is the veil rent between us and God—the veil which is upon our hearts? Have we found peace with God through Jesus Christ? If so, then out of our sorrow for sin we shall find cause for deepest thankfulness and joy this day. For beside the cross there is a sepulchre, in which is buried, not the body of Christ, but the burden of our sin. "Upon that place," says Bunyan, "stood a cross, and a little below, in the bottom, a sepulchre. So I saw in my dream, that just as Christian came up unto the cross, his burden loosed from off his shoulders, and fell from off his back, and began to tremble, and so continued to do till it came to the mouth of the sepulchre, where it fell in, and I saw it no more."

III. But further and shortly, that rent veil signifies to us not only that our sins are taken away, but that *death too is conquered.* Death is the veil that hides this world from the next. How thick it is, how dark and gloomy!—we cannot see through it, or tell what is on the other side. It has caused much fear and anguish of heart. To the Jews it was the one great calamity that fell upon every human life, the blot upon creation that terrified them with its mystery. The Jews never understood death, they never got reconciled to it. Sometimes their faith triumphed over their fears, and they hoped for a life beyond the grave that would never die. At other times their hopes became almost extinct. They saw death to be

the victor, and the grave the end of everything. At the best, death was to them a sore discouragement, an unsolved problem. God was on the other side of the veil, they knew that; but whether He dwelt there alone or in company with the living saints of bygone days, they could not be quite sure. So the whole of life was to them but a walking in the valley of the shadow of death, at the farther end of which sat that giant form—dim, dark, repulsive—filling up the whole space, and projecting his gloomy shadow along the whole path they travelled. But Christ has changed all this. He has rent for us the veil that is over our eyes, has brought to light the life and immortality that is beyond death, and has shown to us on the other side, not an empty heaven where God sits alone, but a heaven that is peopled with all who have loved and served Him here. It is this which makes such a contrast between the New Testament and the Old, between the Christian and the Jew. In the New Testament death is never spoken of with gloom, but with joy; there is a ring of exultation in the words of the apostles when they mention it, as if they felt that they had their foot on the neck of a terrible but fallen foe. It is this triumph of the Christian over death that has made many a one wish to die the death of the righteous who never wished to live his life. For the certainty of an eternity, the certainty of an eternity of blessedness, is the privilege only of the children of God in Jesus Christ. To them

death is not a terror. Their spirits depart; they stray like free citizens into the other world, beholding strange sights, yet without wonder or dismay. So calm is their final change; so undisturbed, as if among familiar things their entrance into their Eternal Home. The veil of death has been rent by Christ.

Brethren, let us approach the table of our Lord to-day in remembrance of Him; in remembrance chiefly of what His death has done for us. In the words of our text, it has rent the veil that is between us and God. Let us think with sorrow of that veil of sin which our own hands have woven, which cost Him so much to remove, and then our gratitude will be all the deeper to Him for taking it away. And let us remember, too, how He has torn down that other veil, the veil of death, which seemed to fall upon our little life and mock all its bright hopes and joys with sudden darkness. Let us remember how Christ has glorified our life by showing us that it is no petty thing of seventy or eighty years, but is eternal as God's own. Then shall we not sit down at His table with greater thankfulness to share in the communion of His Church on earth, when we look forward to a time of higher and better communion with Him and His whole redeemed Church in heaven?

O Father, let Thy wondrous love,
Which binds my soul to heaven above,
My strength and consolation prove,
In life's extremity.

In that dark hour sustain my faith,
Make me victorious over death,
To sing ev'n with my parting breath,
'Death has no sting for me.

I fear thee not, thou cruel foe,
Though fierce thy rage: for well I know
Whither my ransomed soul shall go,
When falls my earthly day.

The quiet grave my woes shall end;
My soul I'll calm to God commend,
And to the land of light shall wend
My angel-guided way.'

III.

DIVINE DISCONTENT.

"He hath set eternity in their heart."—Eccles. iii. 11 (*R. V. margin*).

Few virtues have received more hearty and unanimous praise from moralists and preachers of every age than the virtue of contentment. A cheerful, contented spirit seems to diffuse a kind of moral sunshine round about, which is very attractive; it makes you happier to come within its reach even for an hour. And when you hear any one described as being a discontented man, you mentally resolve to spend no more time in his society than you can possibly help. Scripture, too, bestows its approval upon this universally commended virtue. The apostle Paul tells us that "godliness with contentment is great gain," and declares that he has arrived at a very happy frame of mind in this respect; for he says, "I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content."

Still, while all this is true, a good deal may be said in favour of discontent also. Indeed, I think that discontent is quite as serviceable and quite as admir-

able in its way as contentment. Very much depends upon what we are contented with. If you went into a house and found it abominably filthy, with a woman sitting comfortably in the midst of the disorder, who told you that she had learned in whatsoever state she was, therewith to be content, I do not think you would look upon her contentment, whether associated with godliness or not, as being very much a gain. A little discontent would be far preferable. And St. Paul himself, in a certain sense, was not such a very contented man after all. He could never be content to remain in one place when he could serve Christ better in another, but must be up and away to where work was to be done: he was impatient until he was in the thick of service. He has himself compared his life to a race, and he was never content so long as the goal lay far ahead. And he would have been the first to grow indignant with a man who should fold his hands and say—Now I am content with whereunto I have already attained. A divine *discontent* inspired St. Paul from the beginning of his Christian career on to its very end.

The author of the Book of Ecclesiastes had been a discontented man for the greater part of his life. Over and over again he sums up the experience of life in the brief but terrible words—"Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." He had deliberately tried the whole round of human experiences. He had made experiments with his soul, had denied it no pleasure which

wealth could give it, had plunged into every kind of pleasure which the flesh can crave, had steeped himself to the lips in sensual indulgence, and at the end his verdict upon it all was, "Vanity of vanities;" he was as discontented as when he began. Then he tried another plan. He devoted himself to the cultivation of the intellect. Sick of the pleasures of the flesh, he gave himself up to the joys of the mind. He sought wisdom: in the pure delights of science he endeavoured to still the hunger of his soul. This, too, had failed: with a sigh he was forced to confess, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." He was still a discontented man. Then, in the evening of life, he writes us his book: leaving behind him this unsparing record of his youthful follies and his manhood's failure: telling us that now, when the silver cord was almost loosed, when his dust was about to return to the earth from which it came, one thing only was clear to him above the wreck and the ruin of his life: "Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man." In the words which form our subject this morning, the writer of the Book of Ecclesiastes has disclosed the secret of that discontent which he found within his own soul, and saw in the soul of every human being he had ever met, God "hath set *eternity* in their heart." And having eternity thus set within their heart, perfect contentment is impossible for any soul of man.

Discontent seems to be a strange unnatural thing in

a world such as ours, and to beings constituted as we are. The world is so full of what is fitted to give enjoyment and satisfy the desires of the most exacting. It is not as if we had been set down in a world where we could get nothing that we wanted, as if we were out of gear with the world; as if one being had made the world and another being had made us, so that we felt as strangers in a strange land. God made man and made the world, and made them for each other. When we are hungry, nature feeds us; when we are thirsty, she gives us water to drink; our spirits crave what is beautiful, and earth and sky and sea enrich us with their loveliness; our minds are created for knowledge, and nature supplies us with an inexhaustible store of interesting objects, enough to satiate the intellectual appetite of the keenest inquirer. On all sides of his nature man is provided for: we could not hope for, we could not imagine, a world better suited to his wants. Why should he feel dissatisfied? And yet, has there ever lived a man who has not again and again suffered from a profound and serious and deep-rooted discontent? I do not speak now of those who are sick, or have been overtaken by misfortune: *their* dissatisfaction is easily accounted for, and the wonder is that often when standing by a sick-bed, or speaking to those on whom a crushing trouble has fallen, you find far more patience and cheerfulness than elsewhere in the world. But I am speaking just now

of those who are in the full vigour of strength and prosperity. Do *these* pass through life without a deep under-current of discontent that repeatedly forces its way to the surface and disturbs the even-going tenor of their days? No, you may search for perfect contentment over the whole wide world, and you will find it in no human heart. What is still more strange, perhaps, is that you find the nearest approach to it in those whom you *think least of*. The more frivolous a human being is, the nearer he reaches contentment. He takes a butterfly interest in matters, great or small, and so he wins a careless, butterfly kind of enjoyment out of life. Or he is a sensual man: the delights of the flesh are what he principally cares about, and so he is satisfied as long as he can turn at will from one excitement to another. The nearer a man sinks to the level of the brute, the more stupidly satisfied he becomes. But if you want to see perfect contentment, you must go lower still, to the animal creation itself. You enter a field on a still day in summer, and sit down and enjoy the drowsy beauty around you. The cattle in the field also are enjoying themselves as well as you. They take pleasure in the light, the warmth, the softness, the repose, very much as you do; they enjoy their existence in common with you, *up to a certain point:* and for a short time, perhaps, you distinctly congratulate yourself upon this animal-like felicity. But *only* for a short time. This pleasant state of things

is only the condition for something higher. You must think your thoughts. The cattle stop where you begin—they feel all the peace, the comfort, and stop there perfectly content. But thoughts begin to flit past upon your mind, suggested by the scene before you, unbidden longings stir within your heart — you and the beasts have parted company, you are no longer content as they, for you are a man. You have all felt this many a time, — that strange pathetic melancholy which creeps gradually over your spirit when you have been gazing on some lovely bit of nature's workmanship; the tears are not far from your eyes; and even while you say to yourself that nothing could be more beautiful, a minor chord of discontent mingles with your pleasure. It is often said that this happens because we feel ourselves to be such short-lived creatures in the presence of the lasting hills and woods and streams. But the true reason is the very opposite of this. It is not self-pity which makes us sad. Rather is it because we know that all the loveliness we look upon is changing and vanishing, while we remain and endure. We pity nature, not ourselves. We feel that we are immortals, standing in the midst of a fading and dying world; we cannot hold this beauty within our eyes for ever.

This last illustration, then, which I have used, has brought us to the true reason of spiritual discontent. It is the same reason as that which is given us in

the text — God "has set eternity in their heart." Thus it is that *man* is dissatisfied in proportion as he realizes the destiny to which he is born and for which he has been created, so that if he wants, for a time, to drown his discontent, he can only do it by sinking towards the level of the brutes. God "has set eternity in our heart." We cannot be satisfied with time, or all the gifts of time, rich and generous as these may be. Having in us a hunger for immortality, which the animals have not, we must grieve, as they do not, over the transitoriness of every earthly thing. There is a fitness in the recurring times and seasons for everything here, and the other creatures fall in with it uncomplainingly; but man grieves and weeps over passing years, fading joys, and dying friends, for God "has set eternity in his heart," and that mighty hunger finds nothing to satisfy its cravings here.

I know there are many other things in our hearts besides our consciousness of eternity which provoke our discontent. We sometimes grow discontented because we are not as other men are: we see one who is wealthy, and we become dissatisfied because we are poor: we envy the man who has got five talents when we have got no more than two, or perhaps only one: we grumble because others are strong and healthy, while God has made us weak and ailing. But these things I do not speak of at present, I am only concerned with that supreme cause of dis-

content which God has rooted in every soul by setting eternity in our hearts. From it there is no escape, we are all alike in this respect; health and riches will not relieve it; we could only cease to be influenced by it by ceasing to be human beings altogether. What, some one may ask, has Christ not a remedy for this discontent: can He not take it out of our hearts completely; has He not offered us rest? No; Christ does not take away our discontent, He does the opposite, He increases it, He deepens it. Much of our discontent He does indeed remove: our sinful moods of dissatisfaction, our querulous complainings with our lot and with the course which His providence takes, — with all these Christ is at war. But the discontent which is in us because we are men, because we are God's children, and "He has set eternity in our hearts" — that is only deepened by Christ. If it is ease, self-contentment that we want, then we need not go to Christ for it, we have to seek it at the other end of the scale; we may gain it, or at least we may come near it, but the mark of the beast is on our forehead when it is won.

For, in the next place, this discontent of soul is a blessing. We are better for having these cravings in our heart which can never be satisfied here. Were we without them, we should sink to the level of creation. We sometimes say half-sadly, half in jest, that we envy the peaceful contented lives of the lower animals. But we do not mean what we say.

We would rather have our human life, with its hopes and fears, its pathetic yearnings, its storms and its calms, its immortal outlook, than a life without cares and without hopes beyond those of the present moment. "Picture some tropical forest, where animal and vegetable life luxuriate to the full, and where the swarms exuberant of life know no discontent. Would you give up your high though unsatisfied yearnings for bright but unreasoning life like theirs? Or when, in spring, you wander through the fields, burdened with cares and doubts and fears about the future, while the birds, in utter freedom from care, are filling the air with song, would you exchange with them, and part with your hopes of an endless life, your longings for the Father in heaven?" Why, just to *ask* the question gives it its answer.

Do we not, in the judgments we pass upon one another, honour the men most in whom this discontent of spirit appears? We look with feelings akin to contempt upon those who remain passively content all their days; we speak with approval of those who, whatever their calling may be, are always striving after something better than they have ever yet achieved. When Alexander of Macedon, after he had subjugated the whole of the known world, shed tears that his conquests were over because there was nothing left for him to conquer, however much we may disapprove of the ambition to which he had surrendered his life, yet we admire him more than if

he had sat down in selfish ease to enjoy himself for the rest of his days. The soul that aspires is nearer to God than the soul that is content and still. Or if we meet with one who cares for nothing higher than the worldly wealth and ease and pleasure he enjoys, would you change your noble discontent for his ignoble content with what "perishes in the using"? When we think of the future which lies before each one of us, we shall regard it as a crowning mercy and blessing, that, though at present God does not bestow the life we crave, He does give us longings for it, and refuses to let us forget it, since, even in time, "He has set eternity in our heart." It is this which keeps us from utter degradation; without it how base we should be!

Christians, to whom God has spoken in Christ, and who have listened to His voice, "He has set eternity in our hearts," and discontent is its seal. Do not rebel against that voice; do not seek to hush it into silence; do not pray for contentment, for discontent is your very life. Do you think you would be happier if only you could be more at peace, if only you were not forced so often to turn away in utter dissatisfaction from your own conduct, your own life, your own heart? I pray God that you may never reach such a state as that; Christ will deepen your discontent the nearer you come to Him. I wish that He would inspire both you and me with that inward dissatisfaction, that discontent with self,

that ceaseless, sleepless craving after higher things which gives us no rest day or night, which troubled St. Paul constantly almost like an evil conscience, and made him press toward the mark without thought of stay! A brighter day would then dawn for us all. We should be truer, yes, we should be happier Christians than we have ever been.

Brethren, the one thing that is necessary for us all as disciples of Christ is to advance—to grow in grace. Growth is a thing that is gradual, but it should never stop. It ought to be like time, constantly going on. And the goal which we have in view is set up for us by that Lord Himself whose servants we are; "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." It is a far-off goal; the distance between us and it almost staggers us, as we look away to it, and dimly discern it on the limits of our spiritual horizon. How shall we ever reach it? Well, the great thing is that we be ever moving in that one direction,—not drawn away to one side or the other, but pressing straight on to the mark of our high calling. We need every inducement, every stimulus that can possibly be given us, to keep us in the right path, to stir us to be up and moving, when we are tempted to sit down and waste our time in idle contentment, and forget where we are going and how long our journey is. God has given us many such inducements, but of all of them the most potent is that discontent which is the voice of Christ in our heart,

reminding us that we are still far from home, and that the evening shadows are beginning to fall.

So, friends, this is what it comes to in the long run. God has "set eternity in our hearts,"—in your heart and mine, as well as in the heart of every human being He has ever created. That eternal longing can never be quenched; it makes itself heard in every soul, however men may strive to drown it. But in Christ we have chosen a better way. We wish to listen to it earnestly now; we would fain hush every sound that would make it unheard. And what does that voice of discontent say to us who are treading the narrow way? It says, "Let there be no sloth in your spiritual life." There are some men who labour from morning to night to win and save the treasures of this life, and are slothful, languid in the work of their own salvation. And if they could gain the whole world and lose their own souls, what is the profit? Therefore—so the voice says—press on, for the way is long to the kingdom of God. The wise men from the east, when they saw the star, rose up to follow it; and they followed it through a long travail, through all the dangers and difficulties of a long journey. And surely it is a long journey for you and for me to attain the kingdom of God. If what we call the conversion of the soul to God is a great work, the conformity of our heart and will to the will and perfection of God is a still greater work. The attaining of eternal life, that is, so to live that

eternal life may be in us here, is the greatest work that God and we can do. A life of repentance is a long way to the kingdom of God. Life is very short to accomplish it. A man may say oftentimes, "I will do this work, but I will take many days to do it in." Surely this work of winning the kingdom of God is not the work of a day. It is the work of a life; and life is short for it, and life is fleeting, and life is swift. The older we grow, the shorter are our years, the less strength we have to do this great work. We cannot promise ourselves to-morrow; to-morrow is God's, to-day is ours. Let us listen, therefore, to the voice of God which speaks to us in the discontent of our souls; let us use every moment and cast off sloth, that we may obtain the crown.

IV.

ALL THINGS WORKING FOR GOOD.

"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God."—ROM. VIII. 28.

THE words which I have read are really among the most difficult in the whole compass of God's word. I do not mean that they are difficult to understand, for the sense of them is plain enough. A child almost could tell you their meaning; and the idea they embody is one of the commonplaces of Christian thought. Of course, it may be said, those who love God will be cared for by God; He rules everything, and therefore everything will turn out to their advantage in the end. Still, these words are difficult in two ways: they are difficult to explain—that is, to prove them true; and they are difficult to act upon. It is not an easy thing to accept all the changes and hardships of life, and yet continue to believe throughout them all that things are turning out in the best possible way; and still, unless we can do so, where has our text gone, and what is the use of saying we believe it? It is one thing to receive the truth in

theory; it is another, and a very different, thing to take it into our life in such a way as to feel that it gives us comfort and strength. And so outsiders are not slow to observe that Christians are often openly inconsistent in this matter. They see good men and women professing their belief in the apostle's words when he says that all things work together for their good, and yet evidently thinking that things are occasionally working very badly. And thus the idea which St. Paul here expresses is very commonly greeted with an incredulous smile. Moreover, in strict justice it must be said that the manner in which this truth is often presented is enough to cause repugnance and aversion. Think for a moment of the way in which we sometimes hear it employed. It is quoted as if it meant that when things do not seem to be happening very well, there must be an absence of love to God. An epidemic seizes a certain town; straightway it is spoken of as if that town must be exceptionally wicked: or a believer who is spared in the midst of great mortality pretends to see in this fact the mark of a special preference for him on the part of God. Or an accident happens, and some one who has escaped it lets it be understood that God had a peculiar leaning towards him, above all who were involved in it. He is not only grateful for his own preservation, but he must needs draw an inference with regard to the spiritual state of those who suffered. In vain has the Book of Job for more than forty

centuries protested against the error that calamities fall only upon the guilty; in vain has the Master declared that the Galileans who were struck down by the fall of the tower of Siloam were not more sinful than other men. Still people judge by their own short-sighted standards, and think that earthly disasters are a proof of indifference to God. We may observe the same spirit exhibited in other directions. A child is taken away from his parents, and there are Christians who will ask if he had not been made an idol of; and the suffering of wounded hearts is intensified by cruel judgments like these. Our Lord has said to His disciples, "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another, as I have loved you." When earthly affection goes beyond this, then it is time to suspect it has been carried too far—but not *till* then.

What is the fundamental error in all such ideas? It is the arrogance of recognising God's presence only by certain signs; of seeing Him work only where something striking happens, and shutting our eyes to His intervention in every other part of our life. This is an idea which is utterly opposed to what St. Paul tells us in our text. He says "that *all* things work together for good to them that love God." This error is one of great strength. We find it everywhere; it manifests itself in a way which is very hurtful to Christian faith. There are many men, Christians in belief, who seem unable to find God except in what is

unforeseen, remarkable, quite out of the ordinary course of events. They are like Elijah of old. The hurricane, the earthquake, or the fire attracts their attention, and they think they hear the voice of God in them: the still, small voice sounds clear and quiet, piercing the silence, but they never notice it, they never dream that God could be speaking to them in such a commonplace way. Like Elijah, they need to be taught that God is in the voice no less than in the storm, and is then speaking most distinctly. For instance, it comes with something like a shock upon the minds of many Christians when they are told that God rules the world by uniform, unchanging laws; and when compelled to believe it, they turn away with the feeling that God has been somehow thrust out of the world. Because the sun rises every morning on the good and on the evil, their confidence is troubled. God fully appears to them only in occurrences which are mysterious, of which the law is imperfectly understood. Should a cure, for example, be effected in a case of disease without the instrumentality of human science at all, they attribute it directly and willingly to God; but the more it is due to the skill of a physician, the more, it seems to them, does the power of God retire into the background. And hence it is that just cause is too often given to the unbeliever to draw his unfailing inference. Ignorance, it is said, is the mother of faith. In a dark century such and such an event is attributed to

God; but to-morrow a more enlightened generation will know the law thereof, and explain the supernatural away. No; this is what we require energetically to fight against in a sceptical age, if we have any belief in God at all. No, He does not manifest Himself to us in that alone which astonishes and disconcerts us. All things, says the apostle, work together; there is a purpose in them, great and small, surprising and commonplace. God acts in the regular laws, as well as in the particular cases of His providence. He is in the thunderbolt, but He is no less in the pure light of the dawn; He is in the shadow which falls upon an afflicted home, but He is also in all its happiness and prosperity; He was in the resurrection of Christ from the dead, but He is also in the death of every one who is laid in the grave which our eyes will never see open again; He is with those struck down by trial, as with those whom the trial spares; He is everywhere, His hand is in every event. "All things," says St. Paul, "work together for good to them that love God."

I. These words contain, in the *first* place, this great truth,—that there is no chance in the world, that all events are marching towards one great end; and this end is the foundation of the kingdom of God. This was a new thought when St. Paul uttered it; it was born on that day when Jesus taught His disciples to say to God, "Thy kingdom come;" it was a ray of

light then rising for the first time on the world. We speak about human progress; no idea is more common; you can hardly listen to any lecturer on hardly any subject without hearing him make some allusion before he finishes to the progress of mankind. Whence did it come? Antiquity did not know it; even to-day it does not exist outside of Christian countries. No; for it is a Christian idea, Christ gave it to men, it is born out of the Christian conception of God. All things work together for good; so chance is no more. God is guiding His world; and He will not guide it downward, but upward. This belief in the kingdom of God, or the progress of humanity, is not a truth which can be proved. The world accepted it from Christ, and has clung to it ever since. Reason did not discover it; reason would rather of itself come to an opposite conclusion. How can we recognise a divine plan, a providential course, in that blood-stained play which we call history; in the appearance of generations that come and go, repeating the follies of those that are past; in those ancient civilisations which have so thoroughly disappeared; in those triumphs of force and fraud; in the failure of good causes, the spread of misery, debasement, and sin, which is such a striking fact in our modern life? Nevertheless, in the face of these facts, progress is believed in, on the simple word of Christ; men have taken from Christianity their belief in the final triumph of justice and truth; even atheists may be heard proclaiming that humanity moves for-

ward, and obeys a providential destiny. Well, that belief belongs to us; we have given it to the world: it is not right, surely, that we should let the world have a greater faith in it than we have ourselves. Yet you will sometimes see Christians confounded, saddened at the sight which this world presents, abandoning themselves to discouragement, and well-nigh despairing of the future. That is a cowardly attitude. The future for us is the victory of truth, of righteousness, of mercy; it is the Lord God Omnipotent reigning. All things are working for this end. All serve to erect the temple of God. Each generation which passes lays its stone there, and the building rises. We often have much trouble to catch a glimpse of His plan; but, though not yet seeing, we believe, and our faith will not be deceived. It is a great truth this, one, the loss of which would effect a greater change in the world than anything else could do. If the God of the gospel had not the last word of history, history would be no more than a comedy without significance and without an end; chance would be the last explanation of it: we should have to say, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die."

II. But this is not enough. We cannot rest contented with knowing what the general providence of God is: we want to know what His plan is with regard to ourselves. And so, in the *second* place, this is precisely what the apostle teaches us here. "All

things," he tells us, "work together for good to them that love God." Thus, below that general providence which brings about the kingdom of God, there is a particular providence which is applied to all those who love Him, and which makes everything work for their good. This belief in the particular providence of God is often taxed with pride. What presumption, it is often said to us, on the part of creatures such as we are, to believe ourselves objects of the vigilant care of God! Do we really imagine we are so important units amid the millions of the population of the earth, that God will interest Himself in the petty details of our life? Yes, we do; for He has told us so with His own lips. Would you say to a child that it is foolish of him to think that his father has any time to give him individually; that he is taken up, of course, with the care of his family as a whole, but never attends to its members one by one? But, you will answer, have those Christians who speak of the love with which God surrounds them, the simple faith of children? No; we may acknowledge that "I am not worthy to be called Thy son;" but our unworthiness does not make God any less our Father. We are men and sinners, but God cares for us all the same. Christians may be accused of many sins, but they assuredly cannot be taxed with pride when they cast themselves at the feet of their heavenly Father, and expect everything from His goodness. Men may insist upon our insignificance, but insignificant as we are, they cannot

arrest the irresistible impulse that carries us toward God. If we are great enough to believe in God, to feel that He alone can satisfy us, what pride is there in believing that we are not deceived, that God responds to the desire which He has Himself inspired in our soul? Farther, we are also asked to believe that the thought of the overpowering greatness of God should convince us that we are wrong. God, it is said, is too great to think of all our requests, or to make all things work together for our good. But Christ Himself has shown us how foolish is the thought that God's greatness can prevent His care for each of His creatures. He points us to the lilies of the field, and bids us mark how God has clothed each one of them with a splendour surpassing that of Solomon; and to the birds of the air, the fall of one of which is not unnoted by God. "If God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall He not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?"

Again, the Christian's trust in God's care is sometimes attacked on the score of its being selfish. When you speak of the intervention of God in your life, when you affirm that in His dispensations all things are working for your good, you may happen to hear some accuse you of thinking only of your own interests. They seem to think that man ought never to seek his own good. He ought to obey duty, that is all. What does the good which may result from it

matter to him? He should content himself with working for truth and for righteousness; he knows that his work should contribute to their triumph. That should be the only motive which makes him act. All the rest is inferior, and unworthy of him. You have all heard that reasoning, brethren, and it often gives itself airs of great superiority, and tries to make out that its morality is higher than Christian morality. If all that men wish to affirm by arguments of this kind is that purely personal interest is a mercenary consideration and should be justly stigmatized, if they wish to condemn those who serve God merely that they may get a reward from Him, they are right; but we may well reply to them that the gospel has long ago said all that with incomparable power. Never has the mercenary spirit been more mercilessly condemned than by Jesus Christ. But because we ought to serve God without calculation, it does not follow that we ought to be wholly indifferent to our own destiny, or that we ought not to accept all the encouragement there is in the fact that God is working for our good, while we try to do the best we can for His sake. We may be told that the highest kind of goodness is to do our duty simply because we ought, and not to allow ourselves to be influenced by the thought of our Father's care and approval; but if it be goodness, it is so far above what ordinary people can attain to, that it is unhuman altogether. No; we bless the God whom Christ has

revealed, that He has consolations for us, that He does not despise our sorrows, that ever in pursuing His eternal plans He occupies Himself with each one of His creatures, and knows how to count their tears and even their sighs.

We are sometimes perplexed, indeed, when an appeal is made to experience, when facts are invoked, and it is said to us, Of what avail is it to speak of divine intervention and of providence? What avails it to delude yourselves with the hope that all things work together for your good? Reality gives a pitiless contradiction to your beliefs. Are you spared more than others, you who pray? Do deceptions, bitter failures, overtake you less? Does sickness forget you? Does death devastate your dwellings any the less? And when you would escape from the evils which threaten you, are you not, like us, obliged to resort to the human means which experience points out? What! like us you err, you suffer, you die, and you still pretend that in the events which take place all things work together for your good! That is the most formidable and the most popular of the objections which our faith encounters. It is found on the lips of all kinds of men, and it is often strong enough to damp our prayers, and to stem the impulse of our heart to call down the help of God. Still, go to believers themselves, ask their testimony in the matter, and what will they tell you? You say that they are chastened like others, you see them subject to the same

accidents, to the same sorrows; but question them, and they will answer that under those events which, to outsiders, appear simply to be the severest trials, they have discovered the truest signs of the divine goodness. The very men in whom, as in others, we may be tempted to see only poor playthings of fatality, will tell you that chance is a vain word, and that in God's designs all things work together for their good. If you do not find the apostle's words to be true in your case, may it not be just because you do not really see God's hand in them all, that you feel yourselves to be the victims of chance instead of the objects of a Father's care? The believer can turn to his good all the events of life, all the evils which overwhelm it, and, like Jacob of old wrestling with the strong angel, find that they are but blessings in disguise, and win a victory for his soul out of them all. Men will say to you, "The same accident strikes all men, the believer and the unbeliever, him who prays and him who blasphemes." But the fatality is only apparent; in reality the events produce the most different and the most opposite results,—on those who turn away from God, callousness and revolt; on those who humble themselves, sanctification and eternal life. Here is failure, here is mourning, sickness, the most cruel suffering alighting on a Christian soul. Well, you will see that soul seizing those terrible forces which might crush it under their strokes; you will see it humbling itself, and drawing from what might be its

death the secret of true greatness, of spiritual triumph and holiness. This is the real strength of life; Paul found it to be the strength of his. From the outward point of view, what life could be less favoured than Paul's? who would venture to say that all things wrought together for good in it? Yet he himself says it, and evidently believes it with his whole heart. "*All* things." His thorn in the flesh, his temptations, failures, poverty, perils, shipwrecks, imprisonments. He had to endure unceasing persecutions, the snares of his enemies, the distrust of the Christians, the implacable hatred of the Jews, and the mockery of the Greeks. His ministry was stopped, he was scourged, flung into prison, deserted by all his friends, and suffered martyrdom at last. Why, one would say it was enough to overwhelm him a thousand times, and to make him doubt for ever that God intervened in his life at all. But it was out of these trials that the great apostle drew his life and his strength. If you read his Epistles carefully, you will find that Paul grew in grace beneath them all, becoming always more humble, more simple, more charitable; his heart became larger as his troubles multiplied; his faith dispelled the clouds which might have smothered it; in short, he found the secret of his strength in that which seemed as if it must for ever break it down. Do not be surprised at this. His soul was formed at the foot of the cross; there each day he came to seek his wisdom and strength, and there he learned, never more to forget

it, the great truth which our text conveys. Who would ever have thought that the cross could be our triumph, —the cross, the symbol of our sin, the monument of our shame, the eternal disgrace of humanity, where the world mocked and crucified the truest Friend it ever had? And yet the cross is to-day the life, the hope, the salvation of the world.

This, then, is the truth which you are asked to believe. You have faith in the kingdom of God, that the world is slowly advancing towards the goal which God has appointed. That is well; but have faith in this too, that He is guiding your own life as well as the life of the world, and that however dimly you can understand His ways, the day is coming when He will justify them all, and you will see and confess that all things tended to your salvation and eternal blessedness.

V.

MIRACLES.

"The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them."—MATT. XI. 5.

OCCASIONALLY it is profitable for us to take a look at some of our fundamental convictions with regard to the Christian revelation, and assure ourselves as to the grounds on which they rest. There has never been a time, I suppose, since Christianity began, when it has not had to withstand attacks more or less powerful, now from one side and now from the other. These attacks have not always been of the same character; indeed, the correct account of them is that they vary from age to age, so that Christianity has been compelled again and again to furnish a new reply to each new assault. Some have, indeed, held that it is vain for Christian teachers to seek to answer the arguments of their opponents, and that they would be much better employed in doing something else. The objections to different parts of the Church's faith, it has been said, are the same in substance as objections which have

been repeatedly urged in the past, and as often answered; better to let Christianity stand undefended, and simply hold and maintain what the Church has handed down to our keeping. This may be a very good position for some minds to assume, but then there are many others which cannot hold it; they feel the influence of the forces which are antagonistic to faith; they feel it powerfully, and they ask whether the Church is prepared to give a reason for the faith which is in her. They see that those who are arrayed against the old faith are furnished with new weapons, and they ask for weapons of at least equal power and precision. It would be useless to go out to meet troops equipped with modern rifles, with the bows and arrows of ancient warfare.

This morning I mean to say a few words on the subject of miracles. It is not their possibility or credibility which we shall consider. That is an interesting subject, a most important one, a subject which, in view of the objections made to-day from the side of science, the Church is bound to face and bound to answer. On another occasion such a subject as this may very profitably be handled, but at present we are engaged with quite another matter. The question I would try to answer as far as I can is—What is the significance of a miracle; what is it that it does; how does it help us? It may have had an influence over the minds of the men who witnessed it, but what is its meaning for us at the distance of

eighteen hundred years? What is the end, the purpose which it serves? Such a question meets us at the very outset. Before proceeding to the further question, as to whether it is credible that miracles have taken place, it is necessary to settle, in the first place, what the meaning of a miracle is; whether its purpose be this, that, or the other thing. Only then do we know what we are speaking about, when we talk of the possibility of miracles; only then do we know the nature of the ground on which we stand, when we assert that Jesus of Nazareth wrought many signs and wonders in the days of His pilgrimage. I have chosen this verse from the eleventh chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel, as it furnishes us unmistakeably with the meaning which our Saviour attached in His own mind to the miracles which He wrought. "The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them." Here Christ deliberately puts His miracles alongside His preaching. He sets both on the same level; He asks that when we think of Him, nay, when we doubt Him for the moment, as John, His servant, had done, we take His words and His deeds, never separately, but together.

I. In the *first* place, look for a little at the old view with regard to the significance of miracles,—a view which, indeed, is by no means yet extinct. It was

supposed that Christ wrought them in order to prove the truth of the doctrines which He taught. Revelation, it was held, meant that God had a number of truths with regard to Himself and His purposes for mankind, which He wished to convey to men. These were truths which men could never have discovered for themselves, truths above human reason altogether, and so it was necessary that something extraordinary should be done in order that men might be convinced they were true. It would never have done simply for a prophet to appear and declare, "I have been commissioned by God to tell you that such and such things are true;" for his hearers would at once have rejoined, "But how do we know that you are speaking the truth: how do we know that God has sent you? You say so, but so might any one: we must have some proof before we can accept what you tell us." This difficulty was met by giving the prophet miraculous power. The miracles which he performed were a proof to the people that this man was a messenger of God. They were his credentials, as it were, which he could produce whenever called upon, to testify that he spoke with divine authority. So, from this point of view, Christ performed miracles with the express purpose of convincing the Jews of the truth of His words. He had a marvellous story to tell to men, and He could not hope they would ever believe it unless He showed He possessed a power which other men did not enjoy. His miracles were

the evidence of this power. Had He not done them, no one would have believed Him. The Jews asked Him what authority He had for teaching as He did, and asking them to accept the revelation He made. And for answer to this question He pointed them, as He points us to-day, to His miraculous deeds, as bearing indisputable testimony that He really was what He professed to be—the Son of God. Such is the view with regard to the miracles of Christ, which for a long time was accepted as the only true view, and which still is predominant in the minds of many Christians. According to it, the miracles of Christ are regarded as the buttresses of our Christian faith, the wall of defence which has been raised around Christianity. When attacks were made upon the Christian religion, miracles were appealed to in its defence, and its opponents were challenged to detect any flaw in the evidence by which the miracles of our Lord were established. But of late years a change has taken place. This position, held by the old Christian defenders of the faith, has been abandoned. It has not been carried by the enemy, but it has been undermined. Men no longer say to us, "We undertake to prove that the evidence for miracles is insufficient;" they say, "Even were we to grant you that miracles have taken place, what use are they to you? They cannot prove the truth of a single doctrine. Though a man should do some strange and wonderful works, that could not possibly show that he speaks the truth.

A miracle only shows that a certain person has got greater power than we possess—beyond this it cannot go." As a modern opponent of the miraculous has put it: "Suppose I could change the pen with which I write this into a pen-wiper, I should not thus make what I write any the truer or more convincing." The same writer, Matthew Arnold, goes on to say that no doubt people in general think differently: that if any one were to appear who could work miracles, a great number of unthinking people would follow him, and believe anything he chose to say. However, this would not last very long. The reflecting portion of the community would hold aloof, and soon his followers would begin to fall away, until in a few years he would be remembered only as the doer of some remarkable deeds, and nothing more. Thus miracles are put aside somewhat contemptuously now-a-days: we are told there is no use arguing about them; that even if they did take place, they are of no service; they cannot prove the truth of Christian doctrine, as was once fondly thought. Now, in the main, I agree entirely with what has just been said. If a miracle be nothing more than something startling, a wonder performed before a gaping crowd, to impress them, and get them to believe in the truth of what the miracle-worker says, then it fails entirely of its end. It is no guarantee for anything further than that the man who performs it possesses extraordinary power. Should a man be seen in our streets some

day who could turn stones into bread and then immediately reconvert them into stones again, there would be no reason why we should accept his teaching as possessing greater authority than that of any other human being. He might be a truth-speaker, but he might not. His words and teaching must be estimated in the ordinary way. Hence, if the miracles of the New Testament have no meaning save to convince the men and women of our Lord's day and the men and women of our own day that Christianity is true, they are of no real value. No single Christian doctrine can rest upon miracles alone. The old plan of basing the truth of Christianity upon an appeal to miracles was a mistake.

A striking illustration of what has just been said is afforded us by the conduct of the Jews who listened to Christ and saw His works. They did not disbelieve in His miracles; on the contrary, they believed in them with the utmost readiness; they expected that a prophet should work them, and they would never have hearkened to Christ for a moment had He not done so. And yet what was the result? Did they believe in Christ because of His miracles? Far from it. The very men who had witnessed them, and followed Him about from place to place that they might see more of them, were the men who hurried Him to the cross at last. Though they admitted His miracles, they rejected His teaching, and they rejected Him.

Christ Himself, too, persistently refused to work miracles for the mere sake of overcoming the unbelief of the crowd. The mob followed Him, demanding something more wonderful than anything they had ever yet seen, but Christ turned a deaf ear to their request. They declared that if only they saw some surpassing miracle—fire called down from heaven, or something of that nature—they would put their faith in Him, and hail Him as their Messiah. But our Lord sternly rebuked their foolish thoughts. It was a wicked and adulterous generation, He said, that sought after such a sign, and no sign would be given them. So small was His belief in the power of a miracle to produce conviction and faith.

II. What, then, is the true significance of Christ's miracles—why did He work them? To answer this question, remember the purpose for which Christ came to our earth. Put into the briefest possible form, we may say it was to reveal God as our Father, as a God of love. God has given us many revelations of Himself, which all tell us something of His nature and character. You have His revelation in nature. Nature has numberless voices, but they all unite in testifying that God is a God of wisdom and power. He holds the planets in their courses; He shapes the blade of grass at your feet: you search the universe above with the telescope, you explore that even more marvellous universe which the microscope unveils, and

everywhere you are met with the same abundant testimony that God is of infinite intelligence and infinite power. God has further revealed Himself in the conscience of man, and in the history of mankind. These proclaim Him the moral Ruler of men. Your conscience tells you that you are responsible for your acts to a Being higher than yourself, and to whom you are accountable. History repeats the same tale. Sooner or later the judgments of God overtake the sins of nations. Who, for instance, can read the history of the French Revolution without seeing in it the gathered-up retribution of God's justice upon the selfish luxury, the cruel and heartless immorality of the nobility of France, prolonged through many generations? Nature, history, the human soul, all tell us so much about God. But is there no more we need to know about Him? Yes, surely. Do these revelations say nothing to us about His love? No, nothing; at least nothing clear, nothing unmistakeable. You will sometimes hear statements made to the contrary effect. Some enthusiastic writer, for example, will describe to you the beauty of a summer morning—the larks singing high in heaven, the sunshine chasing the shadows across the fields, and a cool breeze ever and anon lifting the green leaves and letting them fall,—he will describe all this, and ask at the end of it if it is not enough to show us that God is love. No, it is not. God forbid that we should not be grateful for it, and rejoice in it, but let us not push an argument like

this too far. Nature has another side which we must not forget. A distinguished scientific writer has told us that in a forest on a summer day, when everything looks beautiful and serene, were our sense of hearing quickened, say an hundredfold, our ears would be stunned by the cries of suffering on every side from animal and insect life. We must read both sides of the story which nature relates. Her testimony to the love of God is discordant and incomplete. But God is love, we know that now! Yes, but how did we learn it? Not from nature, not from history, not from conscience, but from Christ. Upon the confusions and discords of our world God has let fall one finished and perfect strain of love, which is growing louder as the ages go on. Above all His other revelations, one was still wanting, if man was ever to know the inmost heart of the Eternal. And that revelation was given, dimly in the Old Testament, clearly and fully in Christ. It was a revelation of love, and so it had to be given, not in words only, but in deeds. We are suspicious of a love that is nothing but talk; we like loving words, but we want loving actions to go along with them. God had revealed Himself by His acts as a God of wisdom, a God of righteousness, a God of justice: it was by acts that He must reveal Himself as a God of love also. It would not have been sufficient for God to have sent forth a prophet with the message — God is love, while He Himself remained in the background as it were. Men would

then have said—This is not love as we understand it: we want a love which has deeds as well as words to offer us; otherwise we can hardly believe in it. So God said—I will go down to the earth as a man among men, and let them see my love, so that they can never distrust it again. Christ came—that was what it meant! We now begin to see what miracles really were. Christ did not appear to reveal God by saying to men, "I have got certain truths to teach you which you could never otherwise discover; and in order that you may believe I am really God's Son, and that what I tell you is true, I will do certain marvellous things which ought to convince you I am worthy of credit." No, that is a low, unthankful view of the miracles of Jesus. His lifework lay in a world of suffering. Every hour of every day His eyes fell upon diseased and tortured men and women, His ears listened to their appeals for help. He had come to reveal the infinite grace of God. He was the love of God in human flesh and form. How could He move about among sickness and pain, speaking of the love of His Father in heaven, without relieving the sorrows that He daily witnessed? His heart beat with heavenly compassion; He had the power to heal—how could He refuse? Had He refused, had He gone His way in the midst of human misery without alleviating it, He could have been no Christ for us. His lips might have breathed with pity, but His acts would have contradicted His words. But His acts

and His words are in fullest harmony with one another. And so He classes both together in the words of our text, "The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them." To the mind of Jesus, the preaching of the gospel of God's love to the poor goes along with His miracles: they must not be separated, they are both the revelation of God's love to men. That love was identical in kind with the love which St. John asks from Christians towards each other—not consisting in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth.

Thus, in conclusion, when we are asked—Do you think that the miracles of Christ prove the truth of what He taught? we reply, Not in your sense, certainly. Christ did not work miracles to prove the truth of any doctrine whatever, He expressly discouraged any such idea. He wrought them simply because He loved men, and their miseries moved Him to the heart. But, in a far higher sense, the miracles of Christ are a witness to us that He came forth from God. If you saw a man of immense wealth expending his money in strange and extravagant ways, it would simply show you that he had power, the power which riches can give. But if you saw him devoting his wealth generously to the relief and help of his fellow-men, then you would say, "That man has a kind heart, he is a good man." If we had seen Jesus

doing extraordinary things simply to impress people with wonder and terror,—such as casting Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple and alighting unhurt in the temple court,—then we might say, this strange being has great power certainly, but it tells me nothing of the mind and heart of God. But when we see Him working miracles of quite another kind, withdrawing Himself constantly from the foolish wonder of the crowd, and using His power never for His own sake, but for the sake of suffering humanity; refusing to turn stones into bread to satisfy His own hunger, but feeding five thousand by the lake of Galilee; enduring every pang of the scourge and the cross, yet touching blind eyes and wasted limbs and giving them life,—when we see this, we say, these are the acts of a God of love: it is love that they reveal: Christ's words and Christ's acts are alike a gospel of grace.

In one brief sentence the whole matter may be summed up with regard to the miracles of Christ. It used to be said—We believe in Christ because we believe in His miracles. We now say—We believe in the miracles because we believe in Christ.

VI.

THE PARABLE OF THE TWO SONS.

MATT. XXI. 28–32.

THIS parable was spoken by our Lord towards the close of His earthly ministry. The opposition of the Pharisees was at its height. They were determined to have nothing to do with Jesus. He shocked all their prejudices; He outraged their most cherished beliefs. But they saw that the people were still drawn to Him; they counted Him to be nothing short of a prophet of God. The Pharisees themselves believed Him to be an impostor. But how could they avow this belief and still retain their influence over the people? This was the question which troubled them, and they found it hard to solve. They could not openly deny the truth of Christ's teaching, for the people were inclined to trust Him; they could not deny that He did many mighty works, for there were men standing by who could bear witness that they had seen them done. So they fell back upon the old expedient of asking Him what

authority He had for preaching and working in this way. This is an expedient which we are all too ready to adopt. When a teacher comes forward to proclaim his message, our first question is—not "Is his message true?" but "Is he successful? Has he many followers or few?" Then, if we see many joining him, we bow to the authority of success, and crush in to swell the ranks of his followers. And had the Jewish people as a whole given this adherence to Christ, the Pharisees would have become His disciples as well. But they were in a difficulty. The followers of Christ were drawn from the most disreputable classes, publicans, harlots, and the like, people of no account. The rest of the nation kept discreetly aloof, waiting to see what the Pharisees would do. So the latter were forced to be leaders, where they would have preferred to be followers. And now, having resolved to reject Jesus, they adopted the plan of professing a great regard for the truth. They acknowledged that Christ spoke words of wisdom, that His miracles were striking; but then —what was His authority for working and speaking like this? They were as anxious about the kingdom of God as He was; but before they joined Him, they must be sure of His credentials, to prove that He was sent forth by God. Then Christ spoke this parable to them, more in sorrow than in anger, to show that their professions were mere hypocrisy. They asserted their devotion to the kingdom of God; and yet they

rejected both John the Baptist and Himself. John was a preacher of the Old Dispensation, of the way the Pharisees professed to love; but he was too much in earnest for them, so they cast him off. Christ came and opened up a new way into God's kingdom: the Pharisees were forced to admit the truth of His teaching; yet they refused to accept it, on the ground that they were not sure of His authority. Christ broke through their flimsy pretences. "Your professions of zeal," He said, "are mere promises which you never keep. You promise to reverence God's truth, and when it stands before you in Me, you cast your promises to the winds. Your cry for authority is but a veil to hide the shallowness and falseness of your hearts. What better authority do you desire than the authority of truth? and My words you know to be true. You are sons who are always ready to exclaim 'I go,' but never yet have you gone."

Such was the meaning of the parable to the Pharisees of Christ's day. Has it a lesson for our own? We can hardly doubt it. Human nature is just the same now as it was when Jesus spoke. These two sons are not dead yet, but meet in every city, in every village, almost in every home. And the best way to arrive at the lesson of the parable will be to point out one or two illustrations of it with which we are all familiar. When this is done, we shall hardly fail, each of us on his own account, to

discover something that God is speaking to us individually.

I. The son who made the fair promise, but did not keep it, is the chief character in the parable. The other one, who was better than his word, sets, by way of contrast, the hypocrisy of his brother in a stronger light. In the *first* place, let us see whether, among the openly careless and godless, there are any who answer to the description that Christ gives us of the husbandman's sons. We see some who irresistibly call up to our minds the son who seemed so willing, but turned out to be a sham. They are ready with their promises,—nothing seems easier to them than to make a promise,—but they are slow with the fulfilment of them. I am speaking here of the kingdom of God, I do not mean people merely who make promises and break them. I mean those whom you have the best hopes of that they are just on the point of becoming Christians, and yet somehow always fail at the critical moment. You have become interested in some one of this kind, perhaps; you see so many good qualities about him, that you hope the best is soon to come, and that he will take the one deciding step and become a Christian. He is worth saving—if we may speak about a human being in this way. You approach him cautiously, afraid of defeating your own end by being too hasty. You venture to speak to him hesitatingly about

religion and his own careless life. Perhaps it is the way he spends his Sabbaths that you begin with. He seldom or never enters a church door. So you mention this, with the hope of drawing him into a talk, when you can put in a word or two to make him feel that Christ has some claims upon him. But to your amazement you find all your good intentions frustrated by the readiness with which the man admits everything you like to say. He is ready to acknowledge that he ought to attend the means of divine worship. He makes no excuses for himself. You remark that it is a bad habit which he has fallen into, and he goes farther than that, and maintains that it is wrong. If you then proceed to inquire whether he purposes reformation, you find that there is nothing which he is surer about than this—that by and by he will become completely changed, so far as his bad habit is concerned. You end your conversation with him, and you are far less hopeful than he is, you are less hopeful than you were to begin with. The man you have been speaking to is one of the hardest to influence. He knows his own failing better than you can tell him about it, and yet his self-confidence is not diminished one single iota. He believes he can reform whenever he likes, and promises himself he will do so. So he waits placidly for a more convenient season, which seldom if ever comes. Now he is but an illustration of a wide class, the class of which this son in the parable is the

representative. Those who form it do not need to be told that God is asking them to enter His kingdom. They have heard Him, and the acutest sceptic would fail to convince them that Christ and religion are matters we need not trouble our heads with. What is it that holds them back? They sometimes take themselves to task, and hold commune with their souls about the importance of God, of Christ, of a world to come. They really feel the importance of such matters, and fully intend to make their account with them. But, alas! they never get farther. They have the best intentions,—no one could wish for better,—but they are satisfied with mere intentions, and so delay to fulfil them. They put off God and put off themselves with promises. Yes, I will go and work in Thy vineyard; but if you ask, *When* are you going? then their reply is vague and shadowy. Some time or other, perhaps to-morrow, perhaps next day or year, they are saying to themselves. And we who speak to them say to ourselves, Perhaps never. There is a grim old proverb which tells us that "hell is paved with good intentions." And we know the verse of poetry which says that evil is wrought by want of thought as well as by want of heart. Yes, and heaven is missed in numberless instances from sheer thoughtlessness just as much as from want of heart, from want of a desire to enter it. Now, there may be those among us who belong to the class of which I am speaking.

They promise themselves that they will go and work in the vineyard of the Lord. Could you look into their hearts, you would see a very beautiful picture there. It is a picture of the future, and they would not part with it for anything, for they believe it will yet become true. You see themselves in it, older than they are now, and changed. Their bad habits are gone. They are gentle and good; they take pleasure in the service of God; they love to pray to Him; it is their delight to do His will. The spirit of Christ possesses them, it is witnessed by all around them: their life is a benediction to their fellow-creatures, and men say of them, "These have sat at the feet of Jesus." This is a picture that is in many a heart, which fondly believes it will yet be realized. But, alas! it is only a picture. What are you doing to make it come true: to take it out of your imagination, and fix it in your life? I suppose there is no one here who does not cherish some such picture as this, and hopes that he will yet see it realized in his lifetime. You may not draw its outlines just in the way that I have done, but it amounts in every case to this—that one day you will be in the vineyard working away busily, and enjoying your labour. But is it wise to delay? —that is the question. Sometimes you are startled for a moment out of your contentment. You feel anxious that it was all settled, and that you really were what you only hope to be. You look into

your heart, and your heart answers for you. Yes, my intention is unchanged, I will yet become a Christian: I am not one of those who despise religion—very far from it—I am not hopeless like my brother there, who laughs at the idea of working in the vineyard—I have promised God, and I will keep my promise yet. And so, satisfied to see that your good intentions are as strong as ever, comforted by thinking that you are still resolved to keep your promise, your moment of anxiety passes away, wasted, and you sink into slumber again. What can be said to those in such a frame of heart? Take care lest you trust the strength of your good intentions too far. Remember Samson's story. He was a strong man, but he went to sleep once too often. Twice he was startled from his dreams by the cry—"The Philistines are upon thee, Samson!" Twice he rose with unabated strength, and slew the enemies that were crowding around him: three times he lay down rejoicing to think that he was more than a match for every foe. But the third time that he awoke and rose, he was weak as a common man. Do not trust your good intentions. They may seem strong enough to take you into the vineyard any time, and yet the day may come when they will be of no avail. The present is yours, you cannot count upon the future. "Now is the accepted time," not for promising merely, but for fulfilling: now is the day, not for dreaming of salvation, but for accepting it.

There is another class of persons, differing widely from those of whom I have been speaking, and yet who often do not get beyond promises. You find them in churches: indeed, the very place to look for them is at religious meetings of every kind. They take a real pleasure in such gatherings; they like to hear the word of God read and expounded; they like to join in the singing of God's praise; they like to be in places where prayer is made. When any unusual wave of religious feeling has been aroused, and religious services are held in increased numbers, these people become peculiarly active. They attend all of them they possibly can; they will even set aside other duties which seem to demand some attention, in order that they may be present when God's truth and God's message are the subjects of interest. Well, you will say, it is surely not wrong to take a deep interest like this in religion, and to love to hear it spoken about. Certainly not: it is very right and commendable. It would be one of the most serious sins I know of in God's sight to say a single word to check the interest that any one has in a matter of such eternal importance. But still, let us not deceive ourselves here. All this interest may be shown, and yet we may fall short of God's wishes. It was a right thing of the son who cheerfully promised "I go" when his father spoke to him, it argued a much better spirit in him than the surly "I won't go" of his brother. But all the

same, it was a pity he did not keep his promise. What does our interest in religion mean—our love to hear its truths enforced and its duties illustrated? It means that we are making a promise to God. In every sermon that you hear, whatever truth is uttered is addressed to you just as if you heard God's voice saying, "Go work in my vineyard." Whenever your heart says, "Yes, I believe that to be true," in that moment you have promised God "I go." When we sing together, "O let God's name be praised, above both earth and sky," He understands us to mean that we will do all in our power to make His name honoured among men. When we pray that the spirit of Christ may be in us, we promise God in the very words of our prayer—that we shall do our utmost to exhibit the spirit of our Master every day of our life. But, is it not the case that we are all apt to let promise take the place of performance? We may take pleasure in religious services without getting the length of taking pleasure in God's work. We may even show zeal in attending to all the ordinary or extraordinary means of grace that come within our reach, may have our feelings agreeably stirred by them, be deeply affected by what we hear or what we sing, and when the effects have passed away without producing any apparent result upon our life, we still congratulate ourselves upon having cherished these feelings. But, brethren, a religion of sentiment merely, that con-

sists in pleasant feelings, a liking for religious services, will not stand for everything in God's sight. He accepts it for what it is worth, but for no more. It is valuable as a promise; but, like a promise, it may be worthless. It is to be feared that there is a great deal of current religion which is of this type. At the present day there is much interest shown in the machinery of religion, much zeal in establishing religious organizations, much pleasure in listening to the way of salvation expounded and illustrated: many are much affected thereby; they will listen with tears in their eyes to one who speaks in moving terms of the love of Christ, and of the agony of His blessed sacrifice that He made for our sakes, and yet they seldom think of making any sacrifice for Him. Religion is a luxury to them; and they think because they enjoy it, that they must be the people of God. We may enjoy religion and religious services without their making us a bit more serviceable to God, as we enjoy reading a pleasant story, which we dismiss from our minds as soon as the book is laid aside. If Christ Himself were to be here among us, what would He say of us? I think I hear His voice, addressing not a few of those who stand high in reputation for piety—"Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven." I know of men—I could name them—

who are among the foremost in outward religious zeal, and take a very considerable pleasure in frequenting religious gatherings; who would be named among the first were a census to be taken of their town or neighbourhood. And yet some of them are growing rich from the rents of houses in which the poor are living under conditions that make religion, morality, and decency alike impossible; while others of them you must beware of, should you meet them in the way of business, lest they deliberately deceive you in order to put a paltry gain into their pockets. These are extreme instances, and one would be glad to believe that they are rare. But when you see several severe cases of an epidemic disease, you may be sure that there is a large number of cases of a milder type. And may you and I not ask ourselves very seriously whether we be free from blame on this point? Have we not remained satisfied too often with the promises we make to God? We have looked upon ourselves with an approving eye, because we knew the truth, and felt a pleasing, pathetic emotion when we heard it proclaimed. Well, has it influenced our conduct; have we been better men and women because of it; or has it all evaporated in an emotion? If so, then we are classed by Christ along with the son who said, "I go," but went not. Strange though it seem, in our dealings with God we are satisfied, and think He will be satisfied too, with excuses that we could not blind ourselves with

for a moment in our dealings with our fellow-men. Let us have done with this, once and for all. If we are trying to deceive God with promises only, let us at least see that we are doing so, and accept Christ's judgment upon us in the parable here. Or better still, let it have to be said of us, that after making many promises and breaking them, we swept away all falsehoods from our lips, and even at the eleventh hour repented and went. The test of true obedience is to be found, not in the house where the son makes the promise to his father, but out in the vineyard, where there is work to be done.

II. In the *second* place, look for a moment or two at the danger we run in indulging a religion of mere promise, of pleasurable feelings, unaccompanied by some real work and witness for Christ in daily life. It will gradually undermine our strength for Christ's service, and will become to us a savour, not of life unto life, but of death unto death. We may take an illustration of this, that lies far apart indeed from our subject, but will serve to make this point clear. Wherein lies the evil of indiscriminate novel-reading? Many books of that class are indeed poison from the first page to the last, giving false views of life, and teaching lessons that can do nothing but harm. But take the best of them, that are pure and wholesome throughout. You read them, and have the highest and purest feelings of your nature stirred by the

incidents that are portrayed. You have quite a glow of sympathy for the characters who suffer wrongly, and a true admiration for those who behave uprightly beneath sore temptation to do wrong. Surely, we are apt to say, there can be nothing dangerous here: the more of such books we read the better, for the feelings they excite are right and good. Right and good they are, no doubt, but still there is a very serious danger. You read, let us say, of some act of charity to the degraded, and you feel a warm sense of pleasure in your heart over the good deed. You almost feel as gratified as if you had done it yourself. But then, you have not done it. Sitting in your chair, you have only the pleasure of the act, without any of the effort and pain of doing it. And so what happens? This goes on time after time, we get accustomed to the luxury of good emotions without doing good deeds. And by and by we meet in the course of our life with some case of actual degradation such as we have read of, that we might help. Our feelings of pity and sympathy are aroused; but we have so often had them fictitiously aroused without having to do anything but enjoy them, that the same thing occurs here: we are filled with compassion, but we do nothing. The golden opportunity is lost of doing something for Christ's sake. And so, a mere indulgence of religious feelings, however good these feelings may be, weakens us and renders us more and more unfit for God's service. It was a good spirit

that the son showed when he said to his father, "I go:" no doubt he had a desire to help him in his vineyard toil. But do you not think, that by promising and promising, but never fulfilling, he was weakening his strength to do his father's will? And how many there are who indulge in religious sentiment and pious emotion, and who are complacent because they are conscious of these good feelings, and yet who are wearing away any spiritual strength they have by not letting Christian feeling issue into Christian action! "As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." Our religious emotions are indeed the home and sanctuary of our faith. We must feel like Christ before we can live like Him. But our feelings are not to be imprisoned within our breasts, like a pool of stagnant water evaporating slowly into the air; they are rather to be like a mountain lake that sends out its rivers and brooks on every side, a blessing to men and a praise to God. Let this, then, be our endeavour and our prayer, to guard jealously any pleasure we feel in listening to God's voice, as He speaks to us in all our worship in the home or in His house; but ever to remember that this good gift of God is given us to be used,—to be carried out into that rugged field where the battle of Christianity must be fought out and lost or won — the field of our daily, sin-tried, commonplace, tempted life. Then our lives shall be lives, not of promises, but of promise: each Sabbath

day but the promise of a well-spent week — each year fulfilling the promise of the last, and itself the promise of a richer year to come. And when the last year has ended, our lifetime here in God's sight will be the promise of still nobler service in the new life which we then begin.

Just a word or two, in conclusion, with regard to the other son mentioned in the parable. I have already said that he is of secondary importance in the lesson which Christ had in view. Our Lord was speaking to the Pharisees, and they saw a picture of themselves in the son who said, "I go," but went not. His brother, as we see from Christ's own words of explanation, stands for the lowest class of all—who have lived an openly godless life, never took any pleasure in religion, in fact, despised the whole thing. This class was common enough in Christ's day, and it is all too common in our own. You will sometimes hear those belonging to it take a certain amount of credit to themselves. They have a keen eye for the failings of others who are reputed to be Christians, and they sometimes say—At least, I am no hypocrite. I do not pretend, like my brother there, and then break my promise. Well, it is surely but a poor satisfaction that is found in such a thought as this. If you are God's enemy, it is poor comfort to reflect that you never said you were His friend. To all such we may say—Are you not overlooking the very point in the parable which Christ means

directly for you? He does not commend the surly son for his honesty in refusing to make a promise that he had no intention of keeping. The saving part in this son's story was, that he afterwards repented and went. Do not measure yourself by any weak or doubtful Christian that you see, in order to find some little credit to yourself in the very frankness of your sin, but rather consider whether in your case, as well as in his, second thoughts may not be the best; whether, after saying so often, "I go not," it may not be the wisest and the best thing for you to repent and go.

VII.

THE WORKMANSHIP OF GOD.

"We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."—EPH. II. 10.

THE Church at Ephesus, to which Paul wrote the letter from which our text is taken, was suffering at the time from an attack of licentiousness, which threatened to ruin its usefulness. There were doctrinal errors, too, which needed to be dealt with. The latter proceeded, to a large extent, from ignorance of what Christianity essentially was. It was regarded as being merely a new system of the universe, which claimed to stand by the side of the philosophical systems which the busy brains of the Greeks were never weary of discussing. As such it was looked upon as merely a thing of the intellect, that had no real connection with practical life. It was easy then for those who were so disposed to call themselves Christians, and yet continue to indulge in their favourite vices. They received the rite of baptism, they acknowledged in a way the authority of Christ, they sat down at the Lord's Supper, and yet

they had to be told by Paul that lying, theft, drunkenness, were inconsistent with the Christian character. He reproves both their errors in doctrine and their errors in living; but the latter, as was meet, with the greatest severity. These words from the second chapter indicate clearly the line of argument which Paul adopted. The Christian is not a man who has merely certain ideas in his head with regard to God and Christ; he is one whose life and character have been fashioned by God for a special purpose, with which the vices of the Ephesians were at total variance. "Ye are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works." This verse contains three clauses; let us look at these for a little one by one.

I. "Ye are God's workmanship." That is the beginning of the Christian life, according to Paul; it is no mere production of human skill or invention, it is the work of God. Everything is the work of God. At its start the whole universe came from His hands. He is the Maker of all. But the beginning of Christian life in the soul is due to Him in a special sense. If you were asked what there is in the world that you would point to as exhibiting most marvellously the power of God, would you not say that it is anything which has life in it? As our knowledge increases, we can in a very wonderful way destroy and put together again things that have no life. We can break a bar of iron, and then weld together the two pieces once

more, so that the bar is as strong as it was at first. We can take the water which we drink, and resolve it into the two gases of which it is composed; we can bring these two gases together again, and unite them into water once more. We have a great power over things that have no life; we feel that in a sense they are under the control of our own workmanship, to make and unmake at our pleasure. But our power suddenly deserts us when we come to the mystery of life. Our knowledge increases from day to day, but the secret of life flies from us faster than we advance. We can destroy it; we cannot restore it. A child may crush a moth in the palm of his hand, but the skill of the wisest man cannot make it a living thing again. You can pluck a flower to pieces, and then put the parts back into their old places, side by side, but it is not the same that it once was. Something has fled, something that we cannot see, or prevent from escaping. The life is gone, and gone for ever beyond recall. God's power and wisdom are displayed in every nook and cranny of the earth; but nowhere so clearly as in the smallest thing that has life.

Now, the Christian has in him a life that was not there before. For this reason he is God's workmanship. No one but God could have put it there. To create life is beyond the power of every one save Him alone. It was in this way that Christ spoke to Nicodemus—"Ye must be born again," He said. Birth is the beginning of life, alike in the flower, in the

animal, in the man, and in the Christian. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." You cannot tie the wind in a tether, or show the path that it shall take. No more can you make a Christian by any human means. He is God's workmanship. You can describe all the parts of some plant, perhaps, tell where it was found, the kind of soil that agrees with it, and its peculiarities; but you cannot make it. And you may tell many things about the life of a Christian that you know, many things that are interesting to learn; but one thing, the most interesting of all, you must be silent about, and that is, how his life began. It was the doing of God's Spirit, you say, that is all. You may have aided in the work. You planted a seed, and now after many days you rejoice to see the fruit. But you would never take credit to yourself; it was God's secret work in the heart that did it all.

And this spiritual life which we have from God, as it is formed by Him, is under His special keeping. I have said that though we cannot create life, we can destroy it. But here is a life which, once called into being, no power can destroy. Christ Himself is our witness to that truth—"No one shall pluck them out of My hands." This is the real meaning of that old doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, put into simple language. We are God's workmanship; He

has given us life from the dead; and He will guard and keep that which His own hands have made. And yet, are there not many facts that seem to go in the very face of this truth? Do we not see many reckoned to be Christians,—even for many years,—yet some day breaking down so completely that we cannot but say that all those years we have been mistaken? And here I do not allude to those sins which overtake the best Christians constantly, and render the best life such an imperfect one; but to that total collapse of life and character which will not permit us to say there is still spiritual life remaining, any more than we can call a heap of ruins a habitable house. Such cases are among our commonest experiences, and often make us slow to apply the name Christian even to a profession that seems very sincere. The perseverance of the saints is a truth that has much comfort in it, but it should never render us unwatchful. We may use it to soothe, to allay our fears; but woe to the man whom it sends to sleep! For there is much that looks like Christian life which has no right to the name. It is a deception both to ourselves and to others. It is not God's workmanship, it has been turned out by human hands. There has been no surrender of the heart to God, no birth of a new life. It may be a very good imitation of this, but it is no more. Such are they who, in Christ's own words, have a name to live, and are dead. And what signifies a name?

You know how in dreams everything appears to be

quite real. You seem to walk along hard streets, to touch things just as you do in actual life, to meet with friends and speak with them, and hear them speaking in reply. It is all as if it were really taking place, until you awake, and then you find it has been only a dream. How much Christian life there may be that after all is but the dream of the Christian life; looking so much like the real thing, that we are quite satisfied with it until we awake. What matters it to dream we are rich, when we are poor; to dream that we are free, if we be in prison? What matters it to have a religion that is only a human contrivance, that began without God having a share in it? It is not God's workmanship, there is no life in it. It is like a wax flower: almost rivalling the work of nature in its fairness, but without fragrance, and dead. The commencement of the spiritual must be the same as of the natural life: the old words that record to us that far-away story are applicable here as well, "The Lord God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul."

Now, here we are face to face with a very important question both for you and me. We are here as professing Christians, professing, that is, to be God's workmanship. Is our life a fact, or only a dream; is it a real, or only a painted, flower? Is it possible to give a satisfactory answer to a question such as this? Now, whatever we may have to say on this matter, we must not forget that there are many true

servants of God who have not been able to answer it with much confidence. And all of us are not equally sure about it at different times. Sometimes our confidence rises high, at others it sinks down into the depths. The publican who smote his breast and cried, "God be merciful to me a sinner," would go home in a depressed mood, and perhaps go doubtfully and mournfully for many a day; but he was justified in the sight of God, if not in his own eyes. There are many who are like that Mr. Despondency of whom John Bunyan has told us, whose pilgrimage had in it many days of gloom. One thing may be said—we shall never find a safe reply to the question we have asked by seeking it in ourselves. It is here that the error is so often made, both by false Christians and by true. Many a Pharisee looks into his heart, and is quite pleased with what he sees there, and dreams that he is a Christian. Many a true believer looks into the same place, is profoundly dissatisfied with what he sees, and dreams that he does not belong to the household of God. This is too common a mistake now-a-days. We hear a great deal said about our experience, as it is called, as if that were to be the real test of the state of our souls. We may go peering into all the corners of our heart without finding anything to give us satisfaction either way. Do not look into yourselves, but rather out of yourselves—to God. Those who have made shipwreck in their spiritual life have done so

on this account—that it was themselves, their profession, their Christian standing, that took up most of their attention, to the exclusion of God. Our trust is not in anything inward, but in Him. You do not need to ask questions of yourself to see whether you are alive in the body—that comes without asking. Neither do you need to question your experience to determine whether there is life from God within your heart, it will speak for itself if it be there at all. Depend more upon God,—look less to yourself,—and you will find that God will answer the question with which we started, in His own good time. Were this rule followed more frequently, there would be fewer of the type of Mr. Fearing and Mr. Despondency among Christian people. These are made by the attempt to get evidence in their own experience that they are the workmanship of God. How different is the simple, healthy Christian life! George Fox writes two heavy volumes of diary which we can read. Where would we expect to find more about his feelings, his experience, and so on, than in a diary, written quietly, when alone with his thoughts? Yet what is the case? "After he has fairly opened his Christian story, from its birthday beginning, he scarcely so much as alludes to any frame of feeling, but simply puts his face right onward, telling where he went, and whom he saw, and what in God's name he did. He never once intimates a misgiving; and when he comes to die, he is so little concerned for it,

that in what is called his death, he seems simply to forget to live." He trusted not in himself, the work, but in God, the author of the work. When we look upon our own vacillations, when we know how much we long to be good one day, how little we long to be good the next; when we see how all things shift and alter around us, is it not an unspeakable comfort to know that we have not to seek refuge in ourselves, but in God, who changes not? Our feet grow weary, our grasp in Him grows feeble, but He is stedfast and strong. A favourite saying of a saint of God, now some years dead, was, "You have not got hold of God, but God has got hold of you." That is the truth upon which to rely: that He will never leave you nor forsake you; that no man shall pluck you out of His hand; that He who has begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.

II. Further, Paul goes on to tell us something more about this workmanship of God, this life which He creates within us. It is "created in Christ Jesus." You often hear it said about some one that he is leading a new life. He has cast off old habits and old sins; he has turned right round, and is going in the opposite direction from before. Every one who cares for him is pleased at the change. You inquire how it has been brought about, and you learn that the prompting of some friend had a great deal to do with

it. You say that his new manner of life is due to the influence of his friend; he has made a different man of him. Now, this is but an illustration, and a very imperfect one, of the work of Christ upon the soul. I cannot tell you how God acts upon the heart; no one can. There are other mysteries in the world that illustrate His work; that is all which we can say. If any one could be found who could explain to us how it is that a seed planted in the ground will shoot out into life, then we might trust him to explain to us the secret of God's ways with the human heart. But that has never been done yet, and never will. The Spirit of God is like the wind which bloweth where it listeth; we only hear the sound of it, and see its effects. Let us then try for a little to understand the effects of this new creation in Christ Jesus.

When you come to think over the doings of a single day in your life, you are conscious that it is a curious mixture of good and evil. There are many things in it which are right; you did what was right, what it was your duty to do. With regard to these, your account is clear, and you would not wish to change them. They may not entitle you to reward from God, but they do not bring you under condemnation. Other things there are, however, which are evil. You condemn yourself in your heart because of them. Yet you feel strongly inclined to make a distinction here. You have committed sins

deliberately and wilfully. They are your own choice; you have chosen the wrong and refused the right. Others seem not to belong to you in this way. Evil thoughts have started into your mind unbidden, evil desires have assailed you suddenly, coming, you know not whence. They are yours, for they come from your heart, but without your consent, even against your wish. You feel that you would fain deny them, have nothing to do with them, refuse to let them count as guilt against you. And then you think, there is a fountain of sin within me, which I did not make for myself, which was mine at my birth, and is quietly sending its polluting streams to mix with all the currents of my life. You are just experiencing what Paul experienced, you are just thinking what Paul thought so many years ago. Listen to him—"The good that I would I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now, if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. . . . O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" You see Paul expresses the same thoughts that you have, and longs for deliverance from this inward bondage of sin. What is the reason of this tyranny of sin over the soul, which even Paul could not wholly escape? You say it is original sin. Well, that is quite true. However it came about, you know that you are born with evil tendencies, which belong to the very substance of your nature.

It is often remarked that a certain sin is constitutional in one man, another in another. Original sin, most certainly—there, bone of your bone, flesh of your flesh, whether you like it or not. You often hear the word "hereditary" now-a-days. A liking for strong drink appears in an individual; he indulges it, and he transmits that liking, with increased force, to his children. That is just original sin, in other words. Many a one has done for his children what Adam did for the whole human race; he has sinned, and by so doing has poisoned the blood of all who followed him. For it is not only the liking for drink that is hereditary; evil tempers, hateful murderous passions, lying, dishonesty, and any other sin you like to name, are all transmitted in exactly the same way. True is the word that was spoken of old: "the sins of the fathers are visited upon the children." Have you never known this; have you never felt disposed to blame your ancestors, those who have left you the bequest of evil habits, which, for your part, you would fain be without? You would like to lead a nobler and better life than you are doing, and here you find yourself thwarted and confined at the very outset by wicked tendencies which, so to speak, were forced upon your acceptance, that you could no more reject than you can refuse to be an immortal soul. There is a flaw in the original make of our hearts that defeats all our efforts to get rid of it. You will say that this is just the effect of

original sin. It is: it is original sin as it makes itself evident in our actual experience, bidding us defiance, and warring against our soul's peace every day. Well might Paul exclaim, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" if his experience was anything like ours. Is there any deliverance from this state of things; or are we caught so firmly in the grasp of sin that we cannot escape? There is a deliverance—given in the words of the text: "Ye are God's workmanship: created in Christ Jesus." You often think—"If I had but life to begin over again, what a different thing I would make of it; how I know the sins to which I am liable; how jealously would I guard every avenue by which they might surprise me! But now they have grown upon me, and I cannot shake them off; my original tendencies to evil have grown stronger and stronger, until now I have no more power to change. I would need to be born again before I could become a changed man." Yes, that is just what you need, and just what God offers you here. Not a mere improvement on the old, but something new; a new heart, a new life entering into you from Christ. "Created in Christ Jesus." In Christ there is a fresh beginning for you; a new power within the heart from above, the power of God's Spirit, that alone is able to fight the corruption which has its seat there. You say that it is the old life of sin in your very nature which keeps you down. Well, give yourself into Christ's hands, and

receive from Him the seed of a new life, which will grow up, and uproot and destroy the old. That is the gospel which God offers to those who labour and are heavy laden with sin. If it is a gospel to you, which you are glad to know is true, what then? Then you are God's workmanship; you have His Spirit within you, stronger than your sin, and sure to conquer it, however weak you are against it in your own strength. The more helpless you are, the more fatally mixed up with disorder and sin, the more glorious it is that Christ, the only perfect Being who ever trod this earth, is with you in brotherhood. He is within your heart as a living power, more within your reach than the assistance you can derive from any human being or from all. His help is promised you in full measure when you seek it, and He has never yet turned His back upon a friend. The testimony of all His servants, from Paul downwards, has been witness to Christ's saving power. "I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." This is the only way to maintain a hopeful struggle with "the body of this death," that is such a hard and cruel master to us all. All other repentance is hard work; wearisome, cheerless, at the best it gives but momentary relief from pain. But repentance in Christ gives real joy and hope to heart and life. It is a good thing to repent in any way, and we should not slight God's gifts by thinking too little of any real amendment that He may work in us. But the most excellent way, the only way in which there is nothing

to be repented of, is by the new creation in Christ Jesus.

III. Again, Paul tells us the end for which we are thus created anew by God—for good works. Now, to our Protestant ears the phrase "good works" has somewhat of a suspicious sound. It takes us back at once to Roman Catholic days and popish errors. Yet there is nothing in the words themselves to suggest anything that is wrong; they are good, wholesome words, that have fallen too much into disuse now. Good works was a subject that occupied a great deal of Christ's teaching, as well as of His life. We are told that He went about doing good, and He also went about preaching good works. If you were to collect His sermons together, you would find that most are taken up with this theme. What is the Sermon on the Mount, but good works from beginning to end? If any one were to preach a sermon like that at this day, he would very likely hear it remarked that it contained nothing but morality. Well, why should not morality be preached—Christian morality, since Christ set us such an example in doing so? We do not need fewer good works, or less preaching about them; what we need is less pride in them, more humility and meekness going along with them. Christ did not rebuke the Pharisees because they were very scrupulous in their attention to works, but because, on the ground of these works, they were arrogant,

self-satisfied, even in the presence of the heart-searching God. Good works form as necessary a part of the Christian life as faith or regeneration; as Paul here tells us, this is the end for which the Christian was made. God never bestows the gift of life that the thing which He has created may remain all its days stationary, and be at the end of them just the same as it was at the beginning. He makes a child that it may grow into a man or a woman, not that it may remain a child all its days. He makes a Christian, not to stay in the infancy of the Christian life, to remain just as he was when created in Christ Jesus, but to grow up by slow degrees into a fuller and fuller Christian manhood. And how can he grow but by good works, by the law of Jesus Christ his Lord? There is no other way given among men whereby growth can take place. The natural life that God has given us must receive exercise, else it can never be anything better than a sickly, stunted thing; and the same is true with regard to the spiritual. Is it not too frequently the case that we forget this, and let our religious life become feeble simply for want of fresh air and exercise? Christ has told us to cast from us the right eye or the right hand, since it is better to enter into life maimed than not to enter at all. And it is better, indeed, to have some spiritual life within us, however faint its pulse may be, than to be shut out of God's presence altogether. Yet who would wish, with years of Christian discipleship behind us,

to enter into heaven at last, like sickly children, with helpless limbs and puny bodies? What a sorry appearance would we make before God, having failed to fulfil the very end for which we were made! Shall it have to be said of any of us, that we have been created indeed in Christ Jesus, but hardly for good works? Do you ask in what good works consist? The answer has been given us over and over again in the words of Christ. These words are plain enough; the law of Christ is so simple that a child cannot fail to understand it. But it is to the peril, to the irretrievable damage of our spiritual life that we disregard it. "Let your light shine before men,"—in the common ways of life, all the week through,—" that men may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."

Do not be disheartened although you find yourself far short of what that law requires. A child must make many falls before he can walk. Your sin will one day be altogether conquered, although it is with other than mortal eyes that you shall behold its light. Meanwhile, though you fall repeatedly, God will take care of His workmanship. Christ will watch over the life He has created within you, and which you are using in His service. " Do not imagine that if you stray you are no longer cared for by Him; He waits and lingers, whispers and calls, saying, 'Will ye also go away?' laying His hand upon you with a persistent love, that will not be content till you are gathered back into the fold, to be once more a follower" of Him.

VIII.

SIMON BEARING CHRIST'S CROSS.

"And they compel one Simon, a Cyrenian, who passed by, coming out of the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to bear His cross."—MARK xv. 21.

SOME men are born to distinction. They inherit an honoured name, a name which has been associated for generations past with dignity and power; they step at once into a position prepared for them, where they are set on an eminence and are observed by all. Whatever their characters may be, their position renders them conspicuous. Other men win distinction. There is nothing remarkable about them to begin with, they are merely units in the multitude of men and women. But by and by they show that they have qualities of an uncommon stamp; by their character or genius they *force* the attention of their fellow-beings, and at last rise to distinction and fame. There is another class still, considerably smaller perhaps than either of these two, but still a class that does exist. It is composed of people who have honours thrust upon them, without any effort or even

desire upon their part. They are often unwilling to accept them, and feel them a burden rather than a pleasure. Occasionally, for instance, we meet with people who have suddenly come into possession of great wealth, and have been lifted out of a humble station into a life of ease that is strange to them. Especially if they are old people, they often feel in their inmost hearts a regret for the old, accustomed, obscure life which they have lost. This perhaps is a rare phenomenon, but it is not entirely unknown. Simon the Cyrenian belonged to the last class. He was forced to become a distinguished man in spite of himself. He little thought, as he left his country lodging that morning, and walked into Jerusalem to see the sights of the city, that he was going to carry a cross before the day was over. Had Simon suspected anything of the kind, he would probably have stayed at home. Cross-bearing was a path to distinction which he had no ambition to tread. And yet Simon became a famous man that day.

You have doubtless, at some time or other, crossed a dull, bleak, barren moor, where there was nothing to attract the eye or invite you to pause. You were hurrying across it as quickly as you could, when suddenly you noticed, under the shelter of a huge misshapen stone, a little spring of living water, clear and cool, encircled with bright green. And the spot was so lovely amid the surrounding waste, that you could not but linger for a minute or two by its side.

When you think of that day's walk, you forget all about the moor and what it was like; only the little fountain remains a pleasant memory. Simon's life is a blank to us, and we have no desire to be acquainted with it. Doubtless he was a respectable man, with a certain use in the world, esteemed by his neighbours and loved by his family. But all this has vanished. When we think of him, it is that one green day in his history which we see, when he met Him who was the fountain of life, and helped Him to carry His cross. *That* is Simon's sole title to distinction; and it is enough. "Wheresoever the gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this which this man hath done, be told for a memorial of him," to the last syllable of recorded time. Perhaps it may seem as if this is too high praise to apply to Simon. He merely did what he was compelled to do by the Roman soldiers, and surely there was no merit in that? But I think that, if we look at various passages in the New Testament, we shall come to the conclusion that this meeting with Christ was the turning-point in Simon's life. It is worth while considering this for a moment or two. Mark tells us here that Simon was the father of Alexander and Rufus. These two sons of his, then, were Christians, —men of note among their fellow-Christians at the time when Mark wrote. Further, Mark wrote his Gospel first of all for the Christians at Rome: it was in the Roman Church that it was first read. Now,

when St. Paul wrote his letter to Rome, he mentioned a Rufus by name as one of the leading members in the Church. The Church at Rome was not large when Mark wrote his Gospel for it, so there can be little doubt that the Rufus of whom Paul speaks was the same as the Rufus referred to by Mark as Simon's son. Then St. Paul not only speaks of Rufus, but of his mother as well. "Salute Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine." She had been so kind to Paul that he speaks of her affectionately as having been a mother to him. Thus it would appear that the whole household were Christians at an early date. In addition to this, it is not unlikely that the Simon who is mentioned in the Acts along with Lucius of Cyrene, is the same man Simon. If this be so, we find Simon prominent in Christian activity soon after the ascension of Christ. It may be said that all this is but conjecture. That is true: the evidence we have is purely circumstantial. But if we remember the small beginnings of the Christian Church, and so the narrow circle within which the evidence lies, it becomes very strong. We are justified in believing that not only Simon, but also his whole family, owed their conversion to Christianity to the day when he met Jesus on His way to Calvary.

Simon was a Jew belonging to Cyrene, a great and flourishing city in North Africa, and, like many of his countrymen, had come to Jerusalem to take part in the great national feast of the passover. It was a

considerable distance to travel, so he had probably come alone, leaving his family behind in Cyrene. Jerusalem was overcrowded at such a time, and Simon had found temporary lodgings in some village on the outskirts of the city. From this village he started one morning, and entered Jerusalem quite unaware of the commotion which was raging there over the arrest and trial of Jesus. The previous night had been a night of terrible suffering and indignity to our Lord. But now it is over, and He is approaching His end, the end He had looked forward to and even longed for, when the hatred of men could do no more. He is on His way to Calvary. According to the cruel custom of the time, the malefactor who was to be crucified had to carry the cross from the hall of judgment to the place of execution, the heavy end resting upon his shoulder, while the other end trailed on the ground. Jesus had borne the cross in this manner for a short distance, but He now ~~soon~~ gave way beneath its weight. The terrible physical suffering which He had endured had worn all His strength away, so that now He sinks to the ground exhausted and nigh fainting, the cross pressing Him to the earth. "A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." The soldiers are in a dilemma. It is evident that Jesus must get assistance, He can go on no longer. The crowd presses around Him, gazing at Him with, on the whole, little if any more pity than a crowd bestows on a horse that has fallen on the

street! What is to be done? The soldiers will certainly not lower themselves by helping a criminal to carry His cross. The Jews will do nothing to assist; they would flout the idea of touching that accursed piece of wood, the symbol of the Roman despotism, which they hate. The soldiers look around for some one who will serve their purpose, but they see no one. The Jews about them have friends in Jerusalem: it would be dangerous to rouse a Jewish mob by forcing any one there to undertake the hateful task. There has been too much blood shed of late in these very streets, collisions between the soldiers and the people, which they are careful to avoid. They are almost at their wits' end. But just at this moment they catch sight of Simon. His coming is "almost providential," as they might say. He is a stranger in the city; he has got no friends: he is the very man they want. Simon has been walking carelessly along, eyeing with idle curiosity the sights of the city, thinking from time to time of his home in far-off Cyrene, never dreaming of the strange adventure which is about to begin. Suddenly he is attracted by a noise and a crowd at the end of a street: he turns down to see what the disturbance may be, pushes his way to the front,—and the next instant he is in the grasp of the Roman soldiery. His expostulations are unheeded, his resistance is of no avail. That he did resist we know, for it is said that he was *compelled* to bear the cross. But what

is he among so many? The crowd take the part of the soldiers against him. He knows no one among them, and they do not care what happens to the stranger, who is at best but half a Jew. So in a few seconds our Lord is raised to His feet again, Simon is a little behind Him, with his shoulder under the fatal tree, and the mournful procession moves on. Simon's heart was burning within him on the way, as he brooded over the injuries he had been subjected to. He, a respectable citizen of Cyrene, to be forced to help a malefactor on his way to be crucified! What would his wife and children think of it, when they listened to the shameful story? There would probably be some of his fellow-townsmen in Jerusalem that day,—come up, like himself, to take part in the feast. What if any of them should see him in his present position? It would be enough to ruin his reputation for ever in the eyes of his native city. And so innocently he had fallen a victim to circumstances! It was enough to drive a man mad.

Such were the dark thoughts that galled and embittered him as he followed Jesus to Calvary. So this Nazarene had said, "Take up thy cross and follow me." Truly it was a strange following, and a heavy cross to Simon. At length they reach the place which is called Calvary; Simon is relieved of his burden, and stands in the front rank of the crowd, bewildered and aggrieved, watching the crucifixion. But other feelings than indignation have

already begun to make themselves known in his heart. He is interested in this man, somehow. Jesus is totally unlike any criminal he had ever seen. Not a word of complaint has passed His lips. He bears everything meekly, yet there is a dignity in the midst of His shame that arouses something like sympathy in Simon's breast. The cross is raised, with Jesus on it; the soldiers lie stretched on the ground at its foot; the priests and scribes surround it, filling the air with their loud taunts; the malefactors on each side alternately curse the crowd and the sufferer between them,—yet Jesus is silent. He seems to be bearing some inward load of woe that Simon cannot fathom, heavier far than His bodily pain. At last His lips move, He is speaking, and then there falls on Simon's wondering ears that prayer which has moved so many hearts since his day, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." He cannot take his eyes from that patient face. He waits until all is over, hears the last cry from the cross, "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit,"—hears, too, the confession of the Roman centurion, who had seen many a criminal put to death, "Truly this was a righteous man,"—sees the darkness and the earthquake in which nature clothed herself on the death of the Son of God,—and then Simon comes down the hill, with the crowd beating their breasts in vague terror, now that their work is done. That was the turning-point in

Simon's life. Jesus had called him that day, even from the cross, and made him a follower.

The whole story sounds like a bit of romance. We might almost say that it was a chance conversion. What moved Simon to take that turning in the streets which brought him to Christ and His cross, and just at the very moment he was needed? Had he delayed a minute or two, he would have been too late. We cannot say. He is like the man mentioned in our Saviour's parable, who was walking home one evening across the fields, when suddenly he noticed a place where the rains had washed the earth away, and there unexpectedly found a treasure. Simon, too, found that day something he had never expected to find, something he had never once thought of, but ever after it was the treasure of his life.

How curiously we are led! We take one turning in life rather than another, hardly knowing why, and the whole of our after history is changed. It is not chance,—it is God and ourselves. We often say that our lives are very dull and commonplace,—there is nothing romantic or interesting about them,—their story is not worth the telling. If we could only see them for a moment as God sees them, how different they would look! If we could only see the meaning and importance of the events which are taking place, of the things we do so thoughtlessly, the words we speak so carelessly, and understand the eternal interests involved in every hour that we live,

we need not seek for romance outside the narrow circle in which we live, and move, and have our being. "I stood," says a recent writer,—"I stood in the lapse of Time: I saw Eternity behind me and before me. . . . It was a sight for angels and archangels; for indeed God Himself had made it wholly. . . . Generation after generation, hundreds of them or thousands of them, from the unknown Beginning, so loud, so busy, rushed torrent-wise, thundering down, down; and fell all silent: . . . . and oblivion swallowed them all. Thousands more will follow; and *thou* here, of this present one, hangest as a drop, still sungilt, on the giddy edge: one moment while the darkness has not yet engulfed thee. O Brother! is *that* what thou callest prosaic,—of small interest? Of small interest, and for *thee?* Awake, poor troubled sleeper; shake off thy torpid nightmare dream: look, see, behold them, splendours high as Heaven, terrors deep as Hell; this is God's creation, this is man's Life!" Splendours high as Heaven, terrors deep as Hell!—Are these not, after all, the things which make up our life, its essence, its tragedy, its hopes, its fears? And as Simon sat alone in the evening, with the darkness deepening around him, he knew that, although he could not tell why, the splendours of heaven had flamed into his soul from the cross of the dying Christ. In after years Simon often looked back to that day, and marvelled to think how changed and

transfigured it seemed as he now saw it. Then it was but a pain and humiliation to him; now it was the most glorious day in his life. He was proud to think he had had the honour of bearing that cross. He would far rather have blotted out every year in his life than the memory of that one day; he would gladly have relinquished every joy which he ever had, rather than have given up his share in the cross that he had fought with the soldiers to escape from. Cross-bearing is never pleasant, take it at its best; there is always a sting and a hardship in it which makes us smart at the time: take it as for the most part we know it, and we shall find that we generally murmur and resist and complain, and try to shake it from our shoulders. But it must be done. It is through tribulation that our characters are perfected, and heaven is won. So God does not ask our permission, or whether we are willing. He lays the cross upon us, and compels us to carry it whether we will or no. Thank God that He does. I think that for the best of us it would sometimes require more than the knowledge that this is our Father's will, to induce us to take up our cross and follow Christ. Most of us can remember our school-time as children, when we grumbled over the tasks we had to learn, and thought teacher and parent hard when they insisted upon our working when we would rather have been at play. But we are glad now that they refused to

listen to our childish complaints and tears, and so made us the men and women we are. And does not the Christian look back, too, to the crosses of past days, which he thought so hard and heavy, which he would have fled from had he been able, but which God compelled him to carry? At the time you saw no trace of God's hand in it, only the rough unfeeling faces of those who bound you to the tree. But now, when it is long past and over, you understand it better. You see where it led to. The path was rough and hard, but at last it brought you to another cross than your own; it led you to the place where you looked up into the face of the dying Son of God, when His eyes met yours, when you were brought very near to Him, the crucified, "who trod the winepress alone, bearing a sorrow still deeper than yours, and triumphed over it and made it holy, and built out of it a sanctuary of sorrow for you and all the wretched." Such was Simon's experience: has it not also been thine?

Before we leave this interesting story, there is one lesson which we must try to learn. The cross which Simon helped to carry was Christ's cross, not his own. Can ~~you and I~~ we do the same? ~~I think we can.~~ Christ's cross-bearing is not over yet; after nineteen hundred years He is still carrying it; and somehow ~~I~~ we cannot but think of Him as continually tired and needing help. We think of Christ as crucified, and we push Him far back from us, and

speak as if the pain of the cross were gone from Him for ever, and now He were peaceful and happy evermore. I do not know if Christ is happy. I hardly think He is. The Christ that I know is the Christ who preached and walked in Galilee, the Christ who died a little way outside the walls of Jerusalem, and I cannot think that that Christ is very happy in heaven. We sing at our communion table that beautiful hymn, which tells us that "in every pang that rends the heart the Man of Sorrows had a part; He sympathizes with our grief, and to the sufferer sends relief." These words are true. And as long as there are sin and misery in the world, how can Christ be happy? Every day there are things going on which make Him miserable! That is a strong word to use, I know, but knowing Christ as we do, can I use any other? *We* can help Him to bear His cross. We can do something to relieve the sin and the wretchedness beside which we live; and in relieving it, we are making Christ's cross easier for Him to bear. Sometimes in your work you will be appalled by the degradation you meet, by the thanklessness of those whom you try to help. Never mind. It is not a question between you and them,—it is a question between you and Christ. You say, I cannot love these people; their sins are so abhorrent to me, their life so repugnant, that I feel as if I were apart from them altogether. However that may be, there is a question which is being

asked us, and which as Christians it is our first duty to answer. Christ has had compassion on us, He has borne our cross, and now He says, "Will you have compassion on Me? will you help Me to bear My cross? After all, it is the easier load that I ask you to carry."

IX.

ELIJAH AT HOREB.

1 Kings xix. 4–18.

In Southern Germany, not far from Salzburg, there is a steep road that winds upwards from the valley into a wild region of huge limestone hills. Here the peasants of the neighbourhood still point out to the traveller the black mouth of a cavern, far up the cliffs, and tell him that within it lies Barbarossa, the Just Emperor and Friend of the Poor, who has rested there amid his knights for seven hundred years, held in an enchanted sleep. And they say that the hour is coming when the long sleep shall be broken, and the emperor shall descend to set right the wrongs of the poor and oppressed, and bring back to Germany a golden age of peace and unity. So, ever from the time that Elijah was carried away from earth, the belief gained ground that he would come again for the salvation of Israel. The Jews believed that, when he was taken from the sight of his servant Elisha, God had carried him away swiftly and secretly, as He was

wont to do. Perhaps in some secret cave of Carmel or Lebanon he was lying asleep in the hand of God, to be sent forth, as of old, when God's cause required his voice. So, in times of national distress, the Jews looked for the coming of Elijah. Malachi, the last of the prophets, clung to the hope that he would appear, and raise the fallen glory of Israel. "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet," he says, "before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord." In New Testament times he was in every one's mouth. When John the Baptist came preaching repentance and the remission of sins, men said, This is Elijah come at last. But John died beneath the axe of the executioner in Herod's dungeon, and with him died the suddenly-awakened hopes of the Jews. Then they turned to Jesus with fresh expectations. But the cross of Calvary roused them from their dream again. Jesus was not the prophet they longed for. But their hopes, though crushed, continued to live, and live down to the present day. After the lapse of more than two thousand years, the Jews still look for the advent of Elijah. Even yet, as Dean Stanley has told us, when the feast of the passover comes round, the paschal cup is set upon the table, and the door is thrown wide open, in the hope that at that moment Elijah will appear. Even yet, in Jewish communities, when property is found for which there is no owner, or some question arises which cannot be settled, the familiar phrase on the lips of every Jew is, Set them

aside until Elijah comes. Such facts bear witness to the extraordinary power with which this prophet stamped his character and career upon the Hebrew mind.

The secret of the remarkable influence which his name has exercised and still exercises, is not far to seek. Elijah was a Hebrew of the Hebrews,—the incarnation of the spirit and genius of the religion of Israel. Two especial qualities are noticeable in every religious Jew,—his strong adherence to the ancient forms of faith, and his equally strong intolerance of every form of religion outside his own. These two qualities were present in the character of Elijah in an unusually large measure. He had no new message from God for his fellow-countrymen, as had Moses and Samuel and Isaiah: he simply pointed them back to the old paths and the old forms, saying, "This is the way, walk ye in it." And so the Jews, who above every other people have clung with unexampled fidelity to their old law and old forms of religion, down to the present day, regard with peculiar veneration the prophet who was the greatest defender of their ancient customs. Isaiah was always looking to the future, and predicting the coming of the Messiah; Jeremiah, too, saw no escape from the evils of his time, unless in the advent of One with new laws and of greater wisdom than Moses. But Elijah placed his entire faith upon the laws and customs of Moses. He called his people back from the heathenism into which they were

falling, to the worship of Jehovah, as it was practised in the days of their wilderness wandering. This was the work which God gave him to do, and for this the Jews have never ceased to reverence him. And where could they find a prophet more filled with the fierce intolerance of their religion, than in the man who slew with his own hand four hundred and fifty of the priests of Baal, so that the brook Kishon ran red with their blood? The children of Israel have ever felt that in Elijah they beheld a prophet who was indeed bone of their bone and flesh of their flesh, a Jew to his very heart's core; and this has kept his memory and influence fresh in their minds, as if he had died but yesterday.

The passage we have read this morning lets us see him shortly after the great victory he had obtained over the idolatrous priests. The anger of Jezebel, the king's wife, herself a heathen, was roused to fury against him, and he was forced to flee for his life from Samaria.

I. Observe, *first*, the *place* to which Elijah turned his steps. He goes southward, passes out of Israel into Judah, goes still southward to the limits of that kingdom, until he comes to Beer-sheba. There he leaves his servant behind, and journeys still farther into the wilderness alone. Where is he going? What is the object of this long journey? He is now upon the ground over which, many years before, the

children of Israel had wandered wearily, when they came out of Egypt, and sought the promised land. But what spot in all their journeyings does Elijah seek? He rests for a while faint with hunger, ere he has gone very far, but is refreshed and strengthened by meat and drink which an angel brought him. Then he rises again and pursues his way, still going southward, for forty days and forty nights, until he reaches Horeb, the mount of God. Then his travels are over, he has reached his journey's end. He is among scenes that are sacred to the mind of every Christian. This is the place where Moses led his flocks,—the place where he met with God. Around are stern, bleak hills, with bold outstanding crags; but in the glens which lie between them, folded among the mountains, are meadows of rich pastoral beauty, where shepherd and sheep alike love to dwell. Unfailing springs of water are there, and pasture and herbage in rich abundance. Here Moses watched the herds of Jethro; here it was that he saw the burning bush, a type of the Church of Christ for all time to come. Here it was that he led the children of Israel, when they were slaves no longer, to the foot of Sinai, to receive the law from the mouth of God. And now Elijah comes to the same spot. He is the first pilgrim of whom Scripture makes mention, who revisited that memorable hill where God revealed His mind and will to the Jewish nation. It was a natural feeling that led Elijah back here. He was

in a despondent mood. He had been defeated at the very moment when he thought he was to gain a complete victory. He had fought a good fight for God's sake in Israel. Alone, as far as human aid was concerned, he had resisted the tide of idolatry that was rising so rapidly, and threatening to sweep away every vestige of the true faith. To every onlooker the struggle seemed a hopeless one, hopeless as if he were standing by the sea-shore, and should attempt to repel the advancing tide. But Elijah persevered, for God was with him, and at last he saw light begin to break through the heavy clouds that were gathering over the Church. The idolatrous priests of Baal banded themselves together, and Elijah and they made trial to see whether their god or his God would help them in their time of need. The result of that trial was just what Elijah had foretold. Jehovah answered his prayer; but Baal was deaf to the prayers of his priests. For a moment it seemed as if the God of Israel had turned the hearts of the people back again to Himself. The whole multitude burst into a cry, Jehovah, He is God, and fell prostrate before the prophet on the mountain-side. He was now the ruler of the nation. His word was law. His heart went up in gratitude to God for this great victory. But now, a day or two afterwards, he had to flee for his life, and idolatry again became as strong as ever. No wonder he felt despondent. The only thing he could do, was to go away somewhere and lay

himself down and die; he had done his best and failed; what was the use of living any longer? So, sad and disappointed, he would go home to die. Home—but where was home to Elijah? He had no dwelling-place in the cities of Israel; he was a wanderer upon the mountains, homeless upon earth. There was a place for him in the blue eternities above, but none on earth beneath. Yes, there was one to which his heart turned. He loved the ancient religion of Israel, he was heart-broken over the calamities that had befallen it; *its* home was his home, *its* God was his God; he would go back to those solitudes amid which it was first revealed from heaven. There, if anywhere in earth, was Elijah's home. The wild beast that has been wounded to death, drags itself painfully over many a mile, sometimes, back to its lair to die. The exile from his native country, when he feels his end drawing near, especially if he is a broken-down, disappointed man, experiences an irresistible home-sickness,—a longing to be away from these alien faces, and back among the scenes where he first drew breath. It is "home" that is his constant cry. A feeling such as this drew Elijah southward on his long and toilsome journey, until he treads those paths of ancient pilgrimage, and comes even to the Mount of Sinai, the dwelling-place of God. Then he rests, content to live or die, as God wills.

It was natural that Elijah, in his distressed, desponding state, should go back to the very source

of his religion, to the place where it first came from God. And have we not often done the same thing that Elijah did? When we are in distress and despondency, as he was, where do we instinctively go? We take up our Bible: to what part of it do we turn? Is it not to the Gospels, to find what Christ Himself has to say to us? Scripture is a refuge for us at every time; we always like to shelter ourselves under its shadow. It has always something to say to us. It is higher and wider than our every need; it is sacred and heavenly: it restrains and purifies us whenever we turn to it for direction. When we want to speak to God, we go to the Psalms. When our hearts are thrilling with gratitude to God for some mercy which we never expected, and know we never deserved, David has a song of thanksgiving that he puts into our mouth to sing along with him. When we are sad, and wish to tell God of the burden that is weighing us down, the sweet singer of Israel has a mournful plaintive psalm ready to our use, which expresses our sorrow better than any words of our own could do. But sometimes we do not want to speak, we need to be spoken to, and comforted. Then we go to the Gospels, and listen while Christ speaks to us. In our hours of health and strength, we sometimes turn up the Bible at random, and find nourishment for our souls everywhere in its pages,—we read with a stern pleasure the denunciations of the prophets against the sins of

men; or we derive a keen intellectual enjoyment from Paul's profound reasoning upon the mystery of salvation by grace. But seasons arise when this will not do us any good. We need a special kind of food, for we are weak and ailing. Some sorrow has fallen upon us and shattered our strength, some disappointment has overtaken us suddenly, and we feel very despondent, very much alone in the world, as Elijah was. Then, we do not find much benefit in reading what Christians have said,—however great or good they may be. We are not satisfied even with what apostles have left us in writing. Their words are true,—they tell us what God told them,—but we wish to get nearer God, and hear Him speaking to us, without any man, even an apostle, coming between us and Him. We must go back to the early home of our piety,—to where our spiritual life was born, even to Christ Himself. So we go to the Gospels, sure of getting comfort there. We read once more the well-known words,—"Let not your hearts be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in Me." "In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world,"—and so on. We are under the old roof-tree, listening to the Saviour's gentle words, and seeing His compassionate face. We are at rest, we feel we are at home, just as Elijah felt that he had reached home at last when he lay down at the foot of Mount Sinai, and waited patiently for the voice of God.

II. In the *second* place, look for a little at the complaint which Elijah made. Under a solitary flowering broom of the desert, he laid himself down. "It is enough: now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers." This wish to die has been the wish of many a gallant spirit since Elijah's day. Paul felt it too. "Having a desire to depart," he says.

One reason was that the people had turned against him again. "Well," we might say, "had they not been against him before?" They were against him that day when he challenged the priests of Baal to put their gods to the proof; they stood by, expecting that Elijah would be defeated. Yes, but it was different with Elijah then. He knew that *his* God would not fail him,—that he would win the victory in that trial. Even should the priests and the people rush upon him and slay him as he stood,—still, that would be something glorious, to die a martyr's death for God's sake. Elijah would not have minded that: he would have given up his soul, with grim triumph, like a halo, lighting up his rugged face. But now,—to be fleeing for his life like a criminal from justice, helpless and deserted by every one,—an exile from his native land, with no prospect of return,—that was more than Elijah could bear. His popularity was gone. The people had cheered and applauded him when they saw him call down fire from heaven to consume the sacrifice: Elijah's hopes rose high that

now they would cleave to God with purpose of heart. But lo! all this was past; they went back again to their heathenism, and Elijah's popularity sank as suddenly as it had risen. It was a hard blow. Though he lived a hundred years, Elijah knew that he could never give them a greater proof of God's power than he had done, and yet it was of no avail. So he felt that it would be better for him to die than to live. Well, he was just experiencing what so many of God's servants have done,—how frail and short-lived popularity may be. One day Christ is hailed with shouts of "Hosanna to the son of David!" The next, those who were noisiest in their enthusiasm are shouting, "Crucify Him, crucify Him!" Popularity! what a bitter mockery it has proved to those who have sought it,—a will-o'-the-wisp, a bubble floating and dancing in the sunlight, that bursts and vanishes into thin air. Well has an old writer termed it the breath of the people,—their breath that comes forth and is seen for a second or two lingering in the frosty air, but quickly fades into nothingness. Woe to the man that has no better foundation in life than this! And happy is he who, like Elijah, has still, whatever may happen, his God to turn to, and rest in. "He shall not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day." . . . "He shall call upon God, and God will answer him: He will be with him in trouble, and will deliver him."

But there is another side to Elijah's despondency, which is shown us here, and which is not in the prophet's favour. He says, "I am no better than my fathers were." This, too, was rankling in Elijah's mind. He had formed a high estimate of his own work and of his own merits: he knew as well as any one could tell him that he had acted a noble part; had exhibited marvels in the sight of the Jews greater than any of his fathers had ever been able to work; had served God with a zeal that far exceeded theirs. And now it was a humiliating thing to find that he was not able to effect anything greater than they had effected, that his efforts in the cause of religion were defeated as easily as theirs had been. Elijah was a man humbled in his own esteem as he made his complaint to God. This is the weak spot in his character. He was ambitious, as strong men like him often are. To be sure, it was a noble ambition that he cherished, — to set up again the worship of God in Israel. He hoped that he would see this accomplished, but his motives were made something less than pure, by his hopes of the great share that he was to have in the work. And now he was bitterly disappointed, when he saw that he was not to be the honoured instrument of restoring God's faith in Israel. "I am no better than my fathers." In these words we hear the cry of Elijah's heart: "I know I *am* better than my fathers. I have done more wonderful works for God than they

did. I do not deserve my fate." We pity his wounded pride,—for surely if ever pride was pardonable, it was the pride that Elijah took in his great battle for God's cause. God will surely speak comfortingly to him, and tell him he will be successful yet. But no. God is strangely severe sometimes in dealing with the failings of His best servants: whom He loves best, He chastens very sorely. Moses, the meekest of men, forgets himself, and loses, on one occasion, the temper which he kept so wondrously for nigh forty years, with the ill-natured, grumbling children of Israel. For that one fault he was not suffered to enter the land of promise. And Elijah is also punished severely for his ambition and self-esteem. He had prided himself upon the stupendous miracles he wrought. Well, he is to be a wonder-worker no more. Except perhaps one occasion, the last ten years of his life are quiet and uneventful. He is not allowed to finish the work he had begun so brilliantly. Other hands are to be set to it; his own is to be withdrawn. Three men he must anoint —Hazael, Jehu, and Elisha; these are the men God has chosen now to carry out His purposes. They are the successors of Elijah. He must decrease, while they increase. Such was God's way of dealing with Elijah's disappointed ambition.

And may we not learn a lesson here too? When trial has overtaken us, do we not sometimes catch ourselves saying in surprise, "I am no better than

my fathers were"? It is a disappointment to us that we should have sorrow. We have lived prosperously so long, and put the thought of trouble so far away, that it comes upon us as a shock when we share the common lot of humanity. We feel aggrieved, and resent the trial. Why should we—are we feeling that we do not deserve it? "Shadow and shine is life," bitter and sweet, flower and thorn. Such is the universal lot of all God's creatures,—ours among the rest. And yet do we not know that often when the blow has fallen, our first feeling is one that is very like indignation? That word "repining," that may often be truly applied to us in trouble—what does it mean? It means that we are harbouring the secret thought that we are not being treated justly. If life is to be like this, then it would be better to die,—we are no better than our fathers. Do not seek to stifle your sorrow, do not hesitate to give full vent to it, and tell God all about it. But do not let any rebellious feeling creep in, because you are treated just as others are, as if you were better than they, or desired better from God. That was Elijah's fault. If we wish to escape his punishment, let us beware of falling into his sin.

III. In the *third* place, I have time but to notice in a sentence or two, the way in which God revealed Himself to His servant. As Elijah stood at the mouth

of his cave in Mount Horeb, a storm swept over him, then came an earthquake, then a fire, and last of all a still small voice. God was not in the wind, nor in the earthquake, nor in the fire,—only in the voice. What was His meaning in these phenomena? He taught His servant, first, that *trouble is not His final message to man.* Elijah had felt his trial like the storm, shaking him to the very centre of his soul; like the earthquake, upheaving and uprooting all his most cherished hopes; like the fire, scorching and withering his life, and making it a charred, useless thing. But now came the voice, subduing and soothing him, telling him that God was still near. So He speaks to us whenever *we* are tried. He has sent the trial just as He sent the storm, the shaking, and the flame; but when it has gone by, then we hear Him distinctly, and recognise His voice. But, too often, we attend only to our trouble, and miss the voice that follows. Elijah might have gone away back to Samaria after he had heard the wind, thinking, "God has shown me His power. I must just fight away, as I have done. Who am I to contend with Him?" And he would have missed all the comfort of the voice of God. Do not go away bearing your trial with a sullen resignation to the providence of God; but wait patiently upon Him, through that dark time, even though, like Jacob, you should have to wrestle from nightfall until break of day; and then, when you have grown calmer and are prepared to listen,

you will hear the still, small voice bringing home the lessons of your trial to your heart.

Again, Elijah was taught that *God reveals Himself most truly in the most undemonstrative way.* The fire, the earthquake, and the storm were startling and terrible,—but they did not reveal God, it was the quiet voice that did that. Elijah had hitherto looked for signs of God's power in deeds of terror,—in the fire that fell from heaven and consumed His foes, in the four hundred and fifty slaughtered priests of Baal by the brook side. If miracles like these had failed to convert his countrymen, then what hope was left? But God pointed out to him the seven thousand in Israel who had never bowed the knee to Baal,—the fruit, probably, of Elijah's ministry, that he had never heard of, or thought worth attending to. In them was the power of God and the hope of Israel. We are accustomed to see and speak of God's power in nature when it takes such shape as a thunderstorm or an earthquake. But after all, these are as nothing compared with the infinite power that is daily making the grass grow, the flowers bloom, the corn to ripen, and the trees to bear their fruit. The great forces in nature are the silent, undemonstrative ones. So it is in the Church. These seven thousand would do more for God in Israel than all Elijah's miracles, that were so terrible, but so short-lived in their effects. And the Church of our own day sometimes puts forth sudden bursts of power, and produces striking effects that attract the notice of

all around. But these do not exhibit its highest power. These are but the wind, the earthquake, or the fire. Wherever the Spirit of God is making holy the lives of Christian people,—wherever there are families where the young are being trained up slowly into Christian stedfastness, — wherever Christian charity abounds, the erring forgiven, a cup of cold water given for Christ's sake, the hungry fed or the naked clothed because He counts such to be His brethren,—there may be heard the still small voice of the Church of Christ. If that voice were to become silent, we would search for God elsewhere in vain.

And Elijah was taught here, too, that *his ministry was passing away, and the time of the Gospel coming on.* His words were clothed in the thunder and fire of the Law. But this voice was a prophecy of Him who was greater than Elijah and all the prophets. "He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause His voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall He not break, and the smoking flax shall He not quench." We understand the prophecy given to Elijah, better than he did, for we have seen Christ. When we seek God, we find Him nearest to us, not in the smoke and fire of Sinai, not in the slaughter of the priests by Kishon's stream, not in the vengeance which swept Ahab and Jezebel into dishonoured graves, but in the still small voice of the Child of Bethlehem, in the ministrations of Christ among the sick and the sinful, in the Lord that died for us on Calvary. We hear a voice saying,

"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly of heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls." *That* is the still small voice of God.

X.

FORGIVENESS FROM THE CROSS.

"Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."—LUKE XXIII. 34.

THE Evangelists tell us very little about the actual sufferings of Christ upon the cross. Their narrative of the death-scene is very quiet and subdued. They do indeed tell us how Christ was scourged and mocked, and finally crucified, but they rigidly abstain from anything like an appeal to the feelings of their readers. I think that if one were to come fresh to their account, having never read it before, he would be inclined to think it had been written by the calm, impartial pen of a historian, rather than by friends and partisans of Christ. It was a good and right instinct that made them thus restrain themselves when they spoke of the death of their Lord. It serves no religious purpose to have our feelings wrought up and harrowed by an account of the ghastly details that accompanied crucifixion. It awakens horror, compassion, and indignation; but these are not religion. They soon fade, and they

leave no permanent result behind them. It is a comparatively easy thing to excite those feelings,—easy for one who knows the facts, and can present them in a vivid way. But what does it all amount to? It only sets Christ before us as one among many. It only shows us the features in which Christ's death resembled the death of all who suffered in the same manner. And this is not the significant thing about His crucifixion: it is only an accident, a subordinate detail. The important point in His sufferings was just that respect in which they differed from the sufferings of any other human being. Many a man has endured upon the cross as much as Christ endured, and even more; but for all that, "Behold and see if there be any sorrow like unto His sorrow." Sometimes, in looking upon a picture, we are struck at first sight with the skill it displays. Then gradually we begin to feel there is something deficient in it. And after a little we perceive that the less important parts of it have been made too prominent; the attention is drawn to them, and drawn away from what should be the central figure or incident in it. Thus we are left, at the last, admiring, not so much the power of the picture as the skill of the man who painted it. And in so far he fails as an artist. He has not let himself be absorbed by his subject, so as to forget himself while he makes it live on the canvas. But there is no failure in this respect on the part of the Evangelists. If we are moved at all when we read

the story of the crucifixion, it is not the skill of the writers that stirs us; we never think of them at all while we read it. Nor is it the natural feeling of pity that is awakened. The details of the crucifixion are but lightly touched upon; nothing is done to distract our attention from Christ, and His sorrow that was deeper than all outward pain. We feel that there is more here than meets the eye, that the sufferings of His body were the last drop in the cup which the Saviour drank. But if the Gospel-writers thus forbore to dwell upon all those points which ordinary men would have worked up into a pathetic description,—if they looked upon these as matters of very little moment in that great tragedy, —they have been careful to preserve for us what is of the deepest interest and importance, the words which Christ spoke during the last hours of His life. He indeed says but little. Seven sentences have been recorded, uttered either on His way to the cross, or upon it. One of them is an expression of His utter desolation of spirit when the cloud of human transgression rolled heavily for a minute or two over His head, and shut out for a little the sunshine of His Father's face. Another is an expression of His burning thirst when He was utterly exhausted in body. But the other five are not expressions of pain: they are spoken as calmly as ever He spoke to the crowds by the Lake of Galilee. They were truths not limited in any way by the circumstances in which

they were spoken, but truths for all time. And it is for this reason that they have been set down in the New Testament history of the crucifixion. One of them is, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Jesus then was not thinking of Himself; even in such an hour as this He can forget His own sorrow, and think only of those who are inflicting it. We may say that the guilt of His enemies must have been extraordinary, when it could draw His thoughts away from His own pain. But rather let us say that it shows the extraordinary compassion of our Saviour's heart, when He not only thought of His enemies at such a time, but felt only pity for their sin. And the reason that He gives when He prays for their forgiveness, is very striking: "They know not what they do." *He* knew what they were doing. He knew the full extent of the wrong they were committing; but yet He could look at their act as they looked at it,—He could put Himself, as it were, into the place of every one who was at the foot of the cross, enter into their thoughts, and see His own death out of their eyes. And doing this, He saw that one and all they were in a great measure the victims of their own ignorance. They were committing a crime, but they had no idea it was a crime. Seeing this, Christ was filled, not with anger, but with a boundless compassion. In so far as the wickedness of what they were doing was hid from them,—in so far as they were blinded and deluded men,—Christ has no wish to condemn them,

but pities and forgives them all. This prayer takes in many in its scope. It embraces all who were in any way connected with the crucifixion. All were ignorant of the true nature of the deed that was then being enacted on Calvary. But all were not alike ignorant. Some knew more than others, and so, the greater their knowledge the greater was their guilt; while the greater their ignorance the more fully were they included in the purport of this prayer. Let us look for a little at some of those for whom the prayer was uttered.

First of all comes Pilate. He had a large share in the death of Christ. He was the only man in all Judea who could condemn Jesus to be crucified. Let the priests and people storm against Him as they might, He was safe until Pilate spoke the fatal word; and it was not without many qualms of conscience that that word was spoken. Pilate indeed had but few scruples about taking away human life. He regarded the Jews with the contempt of a Roman, and would have slaughtered scores of them with indifference. But this man was different from any Jew, or any man, he had ever met. He touched Pilate's heart and conscience as they had never been touched before; His words moved him, and stirred in him vague yearnings after a higher and better life than he had ever led. All this Pilate felt, but nevertheless the sentence was given, and Jesus died. How could the prayer be offered for him,—"Forgive him, for he

knows not what he does"? We would be apt to dispose of Pilate very summarily. We would say, "If Pilate believed Christ to be innocent, he had no right to condemn Him; if he believed Him to be guilty, he had no right to wish to set Him free. In either case he did what was wrong, and he knew it; there is no forgiveness for him." But Christ passes a more lenient judgment than ours. There were elements in the case of Pilate which bring him within the sphere of this prayer. He had, in the course of his life, come to lose his faith altogether in the eternal distinctions of right and wrong. "What is truth?" he said, half bitterly, half sadly, to Jesus. Truth and justice were matters to him of mere expediency; and he was placed in a difficult position. He had to remain on good terms with Cæsar and with the Jews. If he let Christ escape unpunished, he might displease both of these: the former, for favouring one who claimed to be a king; the latter, for shielding one who claimed to be the Messiah. So, holding as he did the current creed of the day, to which almost all men of his class adhered,—that the most convenient thing was the right thing to do,—he gave way to the wishes of the Jews. It was supreme moral weakness, but he did not know that he was doing wrong.

There are many in whose life the sin of Pilate is repeated over and over, almost in every day of it. They are members of churches, professing Christians, —even actual Christians, many of them. They take

the current opinions of society around them, and make them their own; they see what others are doing, and they do the same: they simply fall in with the habits and ways of thinking of those among whom they spend their days. You cannot say of these people that they know what they are doing,—they only know that other people are doing the same. Now, it is evident that a great deal of sin arises in this way. How you are to act in any and in every circumstance, is a matter that should be settled between God and you alone. What others are doing has nothing to do with you. They may advise you, but you should not allow them to decide for you. There is a higher court of appeal to which every case ought to go, —the tribunal of God. It is not right, when we stop short at any lower authority, and let the matter end there. We have the voice of God speaking to us from His Word, and in our own consciences; and yet in the case of many Christians, who all the while think that they are doing perfectly right, it is not God's voice which is really listened to, but the voice of friends, of neighbours, of the circle in which they move. The clergyman thinks he must do what his brother-clergymen do, and believe what they believe. You sometimes hear it said as if it were an all-sufficient condemnation of a particular one, Well, clergymen in general do not act as you do, or do not believe as you do. The politician thinks he must go with his party, even against his own convictions;

the merchant thinks he must carry on his business on the same lines as others in his position, and asks for no higher warrant for his transactions. I do not mean to say that all do this,—thank God, there are many exceptions,—but it is a practice which is increasingly prevalent, one from which few, if any, can keep altogether clear. And it is the sin of Pilate over again; at the bottom of it lies a real doubt as to the supreme authority of the law of God and of Christ. Like him, we are enslaved by the prevailing habits amid which our life is cast. I have said that Pilate's act showed a pitiable moral weakness on his part. And no less pitiable is the weakness that we show when we follow his weakness,—all the more, indeed, since our light is so much brighter than his. We are afraid to trust God, we are afraid to ask Him alone to decide for us, and to stand by His decision whatever it may be; we feel as if we were safer when we walk in a crowd. And yet, placed as we are, it is almost impossible for us to escape altogether the influences of which I have spoken. Circumstances press in upon us on every side, and mould our wills and ways almost without our knowing it; other men's opinions and habits take hold of us and rule us. God's voice sounds far off, and these voices are so near, that in many things we sin without knowing it; we follow the customs of men, and imagine we are doing the will of God. What is to be said of these sins? It seems a strange and a bold thing to say, yet it dare not be

withheld, for Christ Himself has spoken it. His prayer holds good for us, as it did for Pilate of old, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Such sins, done ignorantly, done under the force of other men's habits and opinions, which have become almost a second nature within us, are forgiven by God. They are already forgiven, and will not be reckoned against us as guilt.

Another group around the cross, for which Christ prays, is composed of the Roman soldiers. They too know not what they do. They are utterly unconscious of any wrong-doing in the matter,—are quite indifferent, in fact. Their work at the crucifixion over, they sit down at the foot of the cross and gamble for the cast-off garments of Christ. Surely, we would think, their sin is a very heinous one. But there was something to be said for them too. They were soldiers, and each of them had soldier's duty to perform. They had taken the oath of obedience to their officers, and when a command was given them they had simply to fulfil it. It was not their part to question its justice; they had only to obey it,—blindly, if you will, but at all events to the very letter. That was the position in which they stood. So, when they were ordered to assist in the crucifixion of Christ, they had to set to work without a word. If asked whether they were doing what was right, they would reply, We know nothing about that, we must obey orders. Even did any of them believe

in his secret heart that Jesus was unrighteously condemned, they would never have dreamt of refusing to comply with what they were told to do. Thus they were placed in a position where they were bound to commit a wrong whatever they did: they must either sin by crucifying Christ, or sin by refusing to do their duty as soldiers.

And this is a position in which we not unfrequently find ourselves too. We are sometimes startled to find that, turn to whatever side we like, sin is staring us in the face. If we move in one direction we break a plain duty, if we move in the opposite one we break another that is no less plain. And yet we must do something, we must move, we cannot stand still. It is a hopeless entanglement we are in; we cannot unravel it, and we are often at our wits' end to know what is the best way of cutting the knot. To a man in such a position, little advice is of any use. Choose the least evil, is all that can be said, and it is poor advice after all. For when it comes to weighing sins against each other, we have a dangerous problem to solve. In a simple matter of right and wrong, we have no difficulty, for we know that we ought to do what is right, whatever the results may be. But when we have to decide between different sins, and try to estimate the results of them, and to adopt the course that seems least harmful, then we are like men groping in the dark. The clear light of revelation and conscience is no longer shining above us to guide us, and when it

is away our wisdom is no better than folly. We cannot foresee results with any clearness of vision, and in all likelihood the course upon which we fix will bring many that we never imagined would come. In such a case, it is strictly and literally true that we do not know what we are doing. This is a distressing position to be in, few more so to any one who has some desire to know what is right and to do it. But there is one comfort in it, and it is a great one,—it is given us in the prayer of Christ. God says to you, You must act, and yet you know not what you are doing. Do your best, or what you think to be best, you will most likely err; but I forgive you, I will not count it against you as sin.

We need not linger to look at the multitude at large that thronged the foot of the cross. They certainly did not know what they were doing. They were led like sheep by their priests and rulers, they had the excuse of utter ignorance to plead for themselves.

But what shall we say of these priests and rulers themselves? Does Christ's prayer include *them?* They were certainly the guiltiest of all the groups about the cross. They had industriously plotted for Christ's life, they had paid the man who betrayed Him, had secured His death by false witnesses, and were now looking at the complete success of all their work. Christ's blood was upon their heads: did He pray for them at the last? It has been held that

they were excluded from His dying intercession ; that Christ never forgave them in life or in death, but that He brooded over their conduct to the last with bitter indignation. But such a supposition is altogether unjustifiable. It would be more near the truth to say that at that time and in that prayer, those who were most present to the mind of Christ were the men whose rage had nailed Him to the cross. Some of them, it may be, did know what they were doing, did know that they were sinning against God in their deed. For them Christ did not pray. But the others are within its blessing. They doubtless thought they were doing God service, and believed that this man on the cross was a blasphemer. They were unconscious of the nature of the deed they were doing. And it is a comfort to think the merciful forgiveness extended to them, because they knew not what they did, reaches the authors of many another martyrdom since their day. Religious persecution has often been set on foot, martyrs have been burnt at the stake, and countless cruelties perpetrated in the name of Christ by men who sincerely believed they were doing God's work. In so far as they sinned in ignorance, doing what was wrong, but believing it was right, so far they knew not what they did, and the Father to whom Christ prays mercifully overlooks their sin.

The same holds good of all religious bigotry. It is quite possible and quite common for men to be engaged with all earnestness in what they hold to be religious

work, to compass sea and land to make one proselyte, to do as these priests did daily, many things that are right and good, and yet to be altogether out of sympathy with the true mind and spirit of Christ. We see this in the case of those who, while Christians, are very narrow and censorious ones, who seem to think that the work of God is confined to their own circle or their own church, who look with coldness or suspicion on all who do not think or act exactly as they do, who do not use their phrases, and applaud all their efforts. This is religious bigotry,—the belief that the great river of the grace of God is confined to the narrow channels which they have dug. Much sin, much loss to the cause of Christ, accrues from such a spirit. Yet He thinks kindly of them, He does not condemn them. They believe with all their heart that they are fulfilling God's will; they know not what they do, so He forgives them, and God forgives them also.

I have spoken of Christ's prayer on the cross, as if it were something more than the mere wish of His compassionate heart. For it is something more. Our prayers are no more than desires,—we leave them to God to judge whether they should be fulfilled or not. But when Christ prayed, His wish was His Father's will. On only one occasion, in the garden of Gethsemane, does He pray with a reservation,—"Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Thine be done." On all other occasions, He asks for what He knows to be

God's will. So, when He says, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do,"—it means that they are forgiven of God.

In conclusion, when we turn away from these special types of character, there are two great classes of our fellow-men that we often think of with great perplexity and pain, over which the prayer of Christ throws the light of a great hope. There are countless millions of human beings who live and die in ignorance of Christ, having had no fair chance, as it were, of becoming Christians. They may be heathen in the literal sense of the word, men with false religions, reared in the worship of false gods, and in the practice of rites that may often seem to us wicked and detestable enough. Or they may be heathen practically, that great mass of beings to be found in every Christian land, born and bred within the shadow of the church spire, and yet as helplessly ignorant of Christ and Christian truth as though they lived thousands of miles across the sea. They were caught in the lap of sin when they were born, they were trained in vice as thoroughly as any Christian parent trains his child to be a disciple of the Lord; they have heard nothing but evil and seen nothing but evil from the time they began to use their eyes and ears. A miracle would have to be wrought, were they to grow up anything but reckless, godless men and women. How does God regard them and their sin? If Christ declared the forgiveness of God upon sins committed in ignor-

ance by priests and scribes, when much of that very ignorance itself was sin, much more does He forgive those whose ignorance has been forced upon them from their birth: they know not what they do. The prayer of Christ sweeps with its benediction across their darkened lives. Condemned of man, they are held in the infinite compassion of God.

But perhaps the best thing of all which we gain from these words of our Lord, when we let their meaning sink into our hearts, is not that we can say, They apply to this class of men or to that; or, They meet our needs in this instance or the other: it is rather when we remember that they apply to all of us in all our needs and all our sins. For they give us a glimpse straight into the heart of God Himself, which changes not to all eternity. The prayer, "Forgive them," is the finest blossom of Christ's own teaching, —that which makes forgiveness of enemies a possibility for every one as it is a reality for Him. It creates within us a new hope for the world: it shows us the love of God, deeply wronged, yet daring to love on unshamed in the face of the men who despised it. It tells us that just as

> "There is no place where earth's sorrows
> Are more felt than up in heaven,"

so too

> "There is no place where earth's failings
> Have such kindly judgment given."

It makes us feel that there is a richness of com-

passion in the heart of God, of which we can but faintly dream, and which has yet to be revealed; it stirs within us dim hopes and longings which shall one day be more than fulfilled; it opens up to the eye of faith long vistas of divine grace, that fade into mysteries of promise and of love.

EMERSON AS A TEACHER.

No one can read Emerson's works with anything like care without feeling that he has derived good from his study; but to tell to others the actual amount of good that has been received, and to show wherein it consists, is a very difficult task. When a man of science has brought to light some hitherto undiscovered law of nature, his contribution to knowledge may be readily seized and readily communicated. When a philosopher lays his system before the world, we can compare it with other preceding systems, can point out where he has made a distinct advance upon his predecessors, or where he has come short of them in his solution of the ever-standing problem. And so far the result of his labour can be summed up, and presented in an intelligible form. But it is impossible to estimate the work of men like Emerson and Carlyle after such a fashion. We cannot define the contributions which they have made to the spiritual wealth of the world by any catalogue of the truths which they taught. We may say, They taught this,

and this, and this; we may go on adding proposition after proposition, each containing some aspect of truth which they brought into clear light: but when we have finished, the student of Carlyle and Emerson will reply, What you have told me may be true, but it forms a very small part of the value which these men have for me. And the reason of this lies here,—the best part of the work which they did consists not so much in communicating new truths, as in putting new life into old, because eternal ones; not in giving us new rules of duty, but in awakening into fresh life our sense of the reality of those old, time-worn principles from which all duty springs; not in setting before us new moral ideals, but in bringing the old ones out of the obscurity into which the sloth and self-indulgence of the human spirit are ever letting them slip, and presenting them again, clothed in their ancient beauty and power. Emerson's influence is personal and spiritual to a singular degree. Even on a first reading, when we are bound to confess, as we shut the book, that we could give little account of what we have just read, we are conscious of an irresistible attraction which persuades us to open it again, and return to its fascinating pages. It is not that we have brought away anything we can talk about. But we feel that the depths of mind and heart have been moved and quickened. Strange, beautiful shapes are floating in the mind,

fading from our view when we attempt to fix them for calm scrutiny, but ever reappearing to charm us and encourage us with the hope that they will yet take the form of coherent thought. Call it inspiration or what we may, Emerson has reached us in a way that few writers can. His spirit has touched our spirit; it has drawn us unconsciously into its own strong and bracing air. Our life is refreshed at its source; we feel more able to think and to see.

Now, a service of this kind, such as Emerson renders to every reader, cannot be conveyed at second hand. Each one who desires it must obtain it from Emerson himself. He alone can communicate his secret; it is lost in passing through another's lips. One thing, however, may be attempted with regard to Emerson and his work,—to define the point of view from which he looked at the world and at man. Unless we can place ourselves by his side, or at least, unless we can allow ourselves to be gradually led thither by his gentle compulsion, he will speak to us in a foreign tongue, and we shall listen to him with impatience and perhaps with scorn.

At the beginning of the present century, a new movement of thought passed over Europe. The mechanical deistic view of the universe, which virtually excluded God from the affairs of the world altogether, began to give way. Man could not for ever rest content with such a cheerless creed, or

find his soul's peace in a world dispossessed of God. Herder and Jacobi, Schelling and Hegel are the names that were foremost among those who sought to restore God to the spirit of man. Herder everywhere urges: When you make of God a mere abstraction, a blind or indifferent being, remote from human life, you deny His reality altogether. You keep the name of God, but that is all you have got. You worship a name, and the name even of the Highest is only an idol. If there be nothing more than this, then let us cast it away, for it is a lie. Let us know ourselves as atheists, and give over the grotesque mummery of worship paid to a shadow. But if there be a living and true God, He must be living in this present world, in human life, in the human soul. Let us seek Him there, and we shall find Him. The new gospel spoke home to the conscience and intellect of an age that, weary of empty abstractions, was prepared and waiting to receive it. In our own country it awoke responsive echoes in the minds of such men as Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Carlyle, and these in their turn carried it into American thought. It aroused in the New World what is known as the Transcendental movement, in which Emerson took a large and leading part.

As was to be expected, American Transcendentalism gave birth to much that was extravagant and valueless. The usual number of vagaries cropped up as a matter of course. Every new truth gives

rise at first to a wild luxuriance of flowers and weeds, of wheat and tares, and it is often doubtful to the spectator whether the good or the bad will ultimately predominate. The American enthusiasts were like men with a novel instrument in their hands, which they did not know how to use, and their first efforts were perhaps productive of as much harm as good. Reformers of all kinds made their voices heard; reformers social, political, and religious. Mad projects for the regeneration of society were launched, and attempts made to carry them into execution. Of these, and of the ferment of the time, a lively account has been given by Emerson in his lecture on "New England Reformers." But amid these distractions, when every one seemed afflicted with giddiness, Emerson remained calm and clear. He saw the follies of the movement as plainly as those who turned away from it in disgust, but he saw also the great promise for the future which Transcendentalism held when time had cleansed it of its abuses. So, with the wise tolerance of the wise, he set himself patiently to guide it, and in due time was rewarded by seeing his best hopes realized.

To derive benefit from Emerson, then, we must accept with genuine sympathy the central doctrine which he held along with the best spirits of his age,— that everything which exists is a revelation of God; that the universe is alive with voices speaking to the

soul of man if he will but listen, nay, that the universe is these voices, and exists for this reason and for nothing else,—to communicate to him the truths which are always falling from the lips of the unseen Deity. At first sight, this seems to be a familiar truth. The belief in God's active, living presence is not strange to us. We have listened and possibly assented to the claim of the man of science, who tells us that, as he lays bare the laws of nature, he is just giving us the thoughts of God which nature is expressing. So too with the philosopher, the poet, the artist, the theologian,—they all seek to interpret for us the language in which God speaks in nature, in history, and in the soul of man. But even when we have admitted these claims, we are not yet alongside of Emerson. Another step has yet to be taken. So far as we have gone, we need interpreters to speak to us and tell what God is saying. In the universe around us, in the soul within, God's voice may be heard, but He is addressing us in a foreign language. Only the experts, after all, can tell us what He says. But Emerson will not rest satisfied with such roundabout methods of communication with God. They may be true, but they are far from being the whole truth. "God speaks," he is never weary of repeating,—"God speaks to every human soul, and that in no foreign language, but in its own mother tongue. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." But we can imagine a bewildered listener to inquire, If this be

the case, why is it that men as a rule do not seem to hear or understand Him? Why is it that I, for instance, am so little conscious of God imparting truth directly to me, that I have no sort of confidence in the views of truth at which I have arrived, but have the uneasy feeling that they may prove unsatisfying to-morrow? Emerson's reply is ready. It is because we have taken the wrong method altogether. We have allowed ourselves to be taught by custom, by the systems and creeds around us, and have trusted the logic of man when we should have been listening to God. His voice, which is native to the soul, has been drowned by other voices, which now alone fill our ears. We have become familiar with a strange language, have learned to speak it, and have spoken it so long, that it has taken the place of our mother tongue. We have sat down by the rivers of Babylon, but not to weep,—only to make ourselves comfortable in our exile; we have dwelt long in that strange land, and learned its ways; we cannot sing the Lord's song any more, for we have forgotten it, as we have well-nigh forgotten the very language of Zion.

For such a state of things the only remedy is to be found in ourselves. If we have sufficient love for truth, sufficient courage to stand alone in the presence of God, then all may yet be well. We must learn to cast off the chains which we have suffered to be laid upon us by all we see and hear, and walk in the liberty wherewith He has made us free. We must

put received opinions behind us, and turn aside from everything which would come between us and that intuition of truth which we have lost and seek to regain. If need be, we must withdraw ourselves from the world in order to break its power over us, go into solitude into the wilderness, the forest, and in the stillness of thought learn to hear God. Solitude we must have in some way or other. Then, when thus withdrawn upon ourselves, when the noise of the outside world has grown faint, and God alone is near, we may learn to hear and understand the language in which He speaks. We shall return to mingle in the affairs and duties of the world as before, but maintain a different relation to them all. We shall merely clothe ourselves with its customs, we will not suffer them to be laid upon us as fetters. We will listen to its opinions, but we will not bow to its authority. No creed, no fashion of thought will have dominion over us, for One alone is our Teacher, and He is God. Only when a man has thus reached full emancipation for his spirit, can he hold intercourse with God,—that is to say, only thus can he know the truth. Most men will shrink from the conditions required; but those who fulfil them are the living ambassadors of God among men. Such was the fundamental doctrine of Emerson's creed, and he carried it out with rare sincerity in all departments of thought. He believed that he stood in full vision of truth, seeing it through no refracting

medium, but directly and plainly. To this conviction, and the duties which it involved, he remained loyal all his days.

> Indessen schritt sein Geist gewaltig fort
> Ins Ewige des Wahren, Guten, Schönen,
> Und hinter ihm, in wesenlosem Scheine,
> Lag, was uns Alle bändigt, das Gemeine.

We may now be able to comprehend what is so irritating to readers of Emerson,—the utter want of system which characterizes his teaching. We miss a logical connection between his sentences, because it was not by logic that Emerson came to truth. God was revealing Himself on every hand: Emerson was a man with his spiritual eyes open, telling what he saw. He stood on a height, and surveyed a landscape of truth spread round about him. His eyes were ravished with its beauties, and he went over it, describing it in detail to those in the valley who saw it not. Why he dropped one object and took up another, he could not tell: the first faded from his sight, and the second came into view, as his glance swept round,—that was all. He was a seer, and whenever any one began to argue with him as to his beliefs, he simply replied, "I shall read what you and other good men write, as I have always done, glad when you speak my thoughts. But I shall go on just as before, seeing whatever I can, and telling what I see." And this he did, without being in the least disturbed by the arguments of his critics or his

own inconsistencies. We find him full of paradoxes: he says on one page something which it seems impossible to reconcile with what he says on the next. He gives us no explanation, makes no apology, is quite unconscious that either is required. He saw both of these truths which he states;—what more do we want, what could be simpler? This lack of logical sequence in his utterances was eagerly seized upon by his opponents, when he first began to speak. They thought it would be no difficult matter to confound and overthrow one who betrayed no knowledge of their customary weapons of attack and defence. So they took his lectures to pieces, analysed his sentences, made their inferences from them, exposed his fallacies, triumphed over him, and slew him in the most approved logical fashion. But to their astonishment, Emerson proved wholly unconscious that he had been defeated and slain. He kept on lecturing, totally unmoved by the storm he had raised, and repeated his offences just as unconcernedly as though his words had passed unquestioned by any one. And, strange to say, the number of his admirers continued to increase, in spite of all the logicians and dogmatists could say. At last they began to suspect that there were other ways than their own of teaching truth, and something better in the soul of man for apprehending it, than the logical faculty. Once they discovered this, they let Emerson alone, as a being outside their circle of ideas altogether.

When we ask, What message has Emerson for the individual? the answer is just what we would expect from his point of view. In one word, it is Self-reliance, the independence of every human soul. This is an old message, many will say; every reformer has delivered it. Develop your own individual self, has been the cry of every spiritual teacher since time began. But Emerson approaches the matter from his own side. Educate yourself, take in all the culture which you can, model your life and character after the highest standards,—such has been the general teaching, such was the general teaching of Emerson's day. But he adopted a different and a truer method. "Never mind conventional shibboleths," was his advice, "but trust your own spirit, for there you will meet God face to face." The world is full of great names, great men who claim to be our guides. We honour them, for they drank at the springs of truth; but we may not forget that we too have our being beside the same sacred well. We will dip our own pitcher into its waters, and quench our thirst, for the fountain is as free to us as it was to them. "Let me admonish you," were his words to the divinity students at Cambridge, "to go alone, to refuse the good models, even those which are sacred in the imagination of men, and dare to love God without mediator or veil. Friends enough you shall find who will hold up to your emulation Wesleys and Oberlins, saints and prophets. Thank God for these good men, but say, I also am a man."

Emerson spoke to a hidebound age, given over to tradition and the respectabilities of opinion. Many who heard him turned away with indifference or contempt, but his inspiring words were eagerly welcomed by a chosen few, and have since borne wide and generous fruit. It is hard to imagine that the time will ever come when his stimulating call to self-reliant thought and action will cease to be required.

Of course his teaching lends itself readily to abuse. Self-conceit will be delighted to deck itself in the garb of self-reliance. Tom, Dick, and Harry may claim to be seers, and put forth their worthless opinions as authentic oracles. Wherever there is prophecy, false prophets are sure to appear. The promptings of personal prejudice, passion, and vanity will be vaunted as messages from God, and the foolish will find a new stronghold for their folly. Such abuses are inevitable from the very nature of things. Not every one who says, Lord, Lord, has entered into the kingdom. Only the man who has surrendered himself in all simplicity and honesty of heart to be taught of God, who is willing neither to strive nor cry, but in pure isolation of spirit to listen "with glad heart to the heavenly Guide," only he will hear His voice.

This doctrine of the independence and dignity of the human soul Emerson carries out with manly consistency in all his writings. He is not ashamed to enlist it for the humblest services. He wins our affection, as well as our admiration, by bringing it into

our everyday life, and throwing its light upon our commonest duties. He enters our home and talks to us like a wise friend. We receive his advice on domestic matters, how to conduct a household, upon manners, upon farming, trade, friendships, and a host of other things. And all through, wherever we meet him, and whatever be his subject,—the manners, for instance, which we ought to exhibit in society,—it is the same standard to which everything is brought, no mere conventional rules made for the hour, and which vanish in an hour, but the respect we owe to ourselves and to the image of God in which we were made. This lofty purity of thought and purpose which Emerson infuses into every sphere of life, is sufficient of itself to give permanent value to his work. Whatever deficiencies we may find in what he has tried to teach us, we feel that he has brought an ennobling influence to bear upon every part of conduct which he has touched, raising what is low, brightening what is dull, and stamping a new value upon things that seemed threadbare and common. The world could ill afford to lose voices like his, too ready as it always is to lend a willing ear to men of a much lower stamp. The appeal which he made in his own day on behalf of himself and those who were like-minded, remains valid in every age. "Amid the downward tendency and proneness of things, when every voice is raised for a new road, or another statute, or a subscription of stock, for an improvement in dress or in dentistry, for

a new house or a larger business, for a political party or the division of an estate, will you not tolerate one or two solitary voices in the land speaking for thoughts and principles not marketable or perishable ?"

Emerson's faults as a teacher lie upon the surface, and to many minds are more distinct than his excellences. The want of system in what he has written has been referred to already, and some explanation of it given. It forms a constant source of irritation to every reader. Take his sentences one by one, and each by itself may be understood,—each is valuable so far as it goes. But the connection between them is difficult to grasp, and too often the result of the whole is but dim and intangible. The connection, in fact, is not a logical one, proceeding step by step in a process which the mind instinctively follows; what it is, it would often be hard to say. Emerson starts with the best intentions. A definite subject heads the lecture or essay which we begin to read; but he wanders on in the course of it, from point to point, with little to guide him, to all appearance, save remote associations, until at last we are left utterly bewildered by the distance we have travelled, and the multiplicity of objects brought into our view. The effect in every instance is somewhat panoramic, — we have been " round the world in a couple of hours."

The fault that has just been noticed points to a more serious fault still,—to one that is inherent in

Emerson's *method* as a teacher. All truth is a revelation from God. We may admit that to be a fact, and thank Emerson for the service he has rendered in emphasizing it so powerfully. But the form in which the revelation has been given to us is not the form in which we can give it, in our turn, to our fellow-men. It is like the rough iron-ore at first, which must be turned by patient industry and skill into the knife, and the plough, and the pen, before it can meet the needs of men. The thought revealed to us has to pass through many a process of cleansing, and shaping, and tempering, in the mind, before it is ready for the use of others. Nature supplies us with but little that can be employed straight off for the sustenance of life. Only the bare elements of existence lie ready to our hand in this way: all others require labour expended upon them to make them ours. So is it in the world of thought. But Emerson seems never to dream that any such labour is required. He attempts to convey to his readers the dim formless shape in which truth first comes to the thinker,—to trace and describe the vague and indistinct outlines in which at first it is revealed to his spirit,—and this it is impossible to do. The raw material of thought cannot be passed from one mind to another. It must be moulded into the rational forms of thought before it can be thus communicated. This fact Emerson too often forgets, so that in seeking to impart the truth which he has seen, he has recourse to analogies and illustrations

where we expect and demand a strictly logical exposition. In this respect he fails, in his office as teacher, of rendering the highest service to mankind. He insists, indeed, with admirable clearness, upon the strenuous labour that is required of all who would apprehend the truth. "What is the hardest task in the world?" he asks. "To think. I would put myself in the attitude to look in the eye an abstract truth, and I cannot. I blench and withdraw, on this side and on that. . . . Our best heed long time avails us nothing. Yet thoughts are flitting before us. We all but apprehend, we dimly forebode the truth. We say, I will walk abroad, and the truth will take form and clearness to me. We go forth, but cannot find it. It seems as if we needed only the stillness and composed attitude of the library to seize the thought. But we come in and are as far from it as at first. Then, in a moment and unannounced, the truth appears; a certain wandering light appears, and is the distinction, the principle we wanted. But the oracle comes, because we had previously laid siege to the shrine." Emerson recognised clearly the labour that must precede the revelation, but he was oblivious to the labour that follows when the revelation has been made. Thus his pages are full of fragmentary presentations of truth, half thoughts which dazzle more than enlighten; so that many a reader turns away from him disappointed, feeling that he has been introduced into a world of shadow.

But the gravest defect which we observe in Emerson is his imperfect sense of sin. We feel when he mentions it that he is speaking of something which is not sin, in our sense of the word, but is altogether milder, less hurtful, less to be dreaded than sin as we know it. He seldom, if ever, approaches it from the moral, but only from the intellectual side. In this respect Carlyle is immeasurably his superior. Emerson had not any profound experience of sin in his own inner life. He was naturally gifted with a moral nature of exceptional delicacy, and experienced little difficulty in overcoming temptations and controlling passions which keep most men in hard conflict to their dying day. His character developed easily and smoothly. He reached a serene height, from which he could lift up his eyes and behold truths that are eternal; but his eyes grew dim and untruthful when he turned them downward upon the actual world that lay sinning and sorrowing at his feet. He saw clearly what man should be; he did not see clearly what man was. Thus his optimism is too generally superficial. He believes in the progress of mankind, but on what grounds? Why, all we have got to do is to listen to the voice of God within us, and to obey it. Sin will prove no serious obstacle. Only let us cease to be cowards, shake off our distrust, have faith in ourselves, act and speak fearlessly, and all shall go well. There is truth here, but only in part. Carlyle saw, too, that God is speaking to every soul of man, and that the

one great duty for him is to stop and listen. "Fool," he cries to every restless spirit that is looking without and around for some great thing to do,—"fool, the idea is in thyself. The impediment also is in thyself." But what Carlyle saw as Emerson did not,—saw clearly, sorrowfully, often despairingly, was that with the vast majority of men the impediment would prove stronger than the ideal. And so he turned to heroes as the hopes of the race,—men who held to their ideal, and wrought it out against all impediments. When the spirits are buoyant, prospects bright, and eyes and heart filled with the "wonder and bloom of the world," then Emerson comes congenial with our mood, and his words drop wisdom, and his tongue is as the pen of a ready writer. But when the mood is changed, and we are down in the dust, when the stress of circumstance and temptation is strong, and the heart grows faint and the voice of conscience is brought low, Carlyle will prove a better friend. Then we do not need one who will cover over sin with smooth-sounding words, or treat us as if we were children frightened in the dark, and trembling at merely imaginary spectres; we need men like David, like Luther, like Carlyle, men whose soul-struggle has been altogether a tragic one, and who can speak to us out of the depths. They alone can give us true help, as they alone can bring us true sympathy. "Poor human nature! Is not a man's walking in truth always that—'a succession of falls'? Man

can do no other. In this wild element of life he has to struggle onwards,—now fallen, deep-abased; and ever, with tears, repentance, with bleeding heart, he has to rise again, struggle again still onwards. That his struggle be a faithful, unconquerable one: that is the question of questions." In these few words there is more help for us than in volumes of Emerson's airy optimism.

Along with this inadequate sense of sin, Emerson exhibited a sensitive repugnance to all forms of pain and misery. A man of healthy frame himself, he shrank, with almost nervous dislike, from suffering, disease, and death, and kept the thought of them as far from his mind as possible. Such things do exist, of course, but what is the use of speaking about them, why should they be dragged forward to disturb our comfort and happiness? Rather keep them in the background, where they will not offend the eye so much. He would fain cover with a decent veil the sores of Lazarus lying at his gate. This may be more agreeable to the rich man, but unfortunately it does not afford much relief to Lazarus. This merely side-glance at moral and physical evil is Emerson's most serious failing. He lacked the spiritual experience which alone could have forced him into a knowledge of the facts, and his sympathy with the sinful and the suffering is in consequence but thin and cold.

Still, after all this has been said, Emerson remains a teacher of the rarest quality. That calm, unvexed

spirituality of character which limited his vision in one direction, only made it clearer in another. He is one of the prophets, speaking not to the intellect, but straight to the spirit of man. Even at a first reading, we meet in almost every page of his writings pregnant sentences, ripe with suggestions that haunt the mind and stimulate thought. But we cannot get the full good that Emerson can give, at a single reading. We must read over and over again, and brood upon his words, before they give up their best gifts. By one who feels that "the soul is more than meat, and the body than raiment," and who is willing to give to Emerson the patient and loving study which he asks, few teachers will be found more inspiring than he. He does not bring new truths and set them before us; he does that which is still better,—he opens our eyes so that we can see them for ourselves. If it be true, as some one has said, that what we need is not more light, but eyes to use the light which we have got, then Emerson has rendered signal service to mankind. For the more we study him, the more do we find that our mental horizon is widening around us; new objects are rising dimly into view, while old ones appear in new and unsuspected relations.

Emerson founded no sect, no school: he would have been the first to disclaim any such intention. Let each individual soul claim its freedom, and assert its independence of any human master,—this was what he taught: he wanted no imitators to speak his

language when they had lost his spirit. For those who dare not walk but in companies, or in the shadow of some great name, he has no message, no reward. But those pilgrims in life's journey, who have chosen that solitary path which every earnest soul must take between manhood and the grave, will not be disappointed if they turn aside to rest for a little at his quiet wayside home. They will be made welcome to his table, will eat of his fare, will learn much from his wise and cheerful lips; they may tarry over night, and then in the morning, they will hear his kindly blessing come after them as they turn their steps away from his hospitable door.

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